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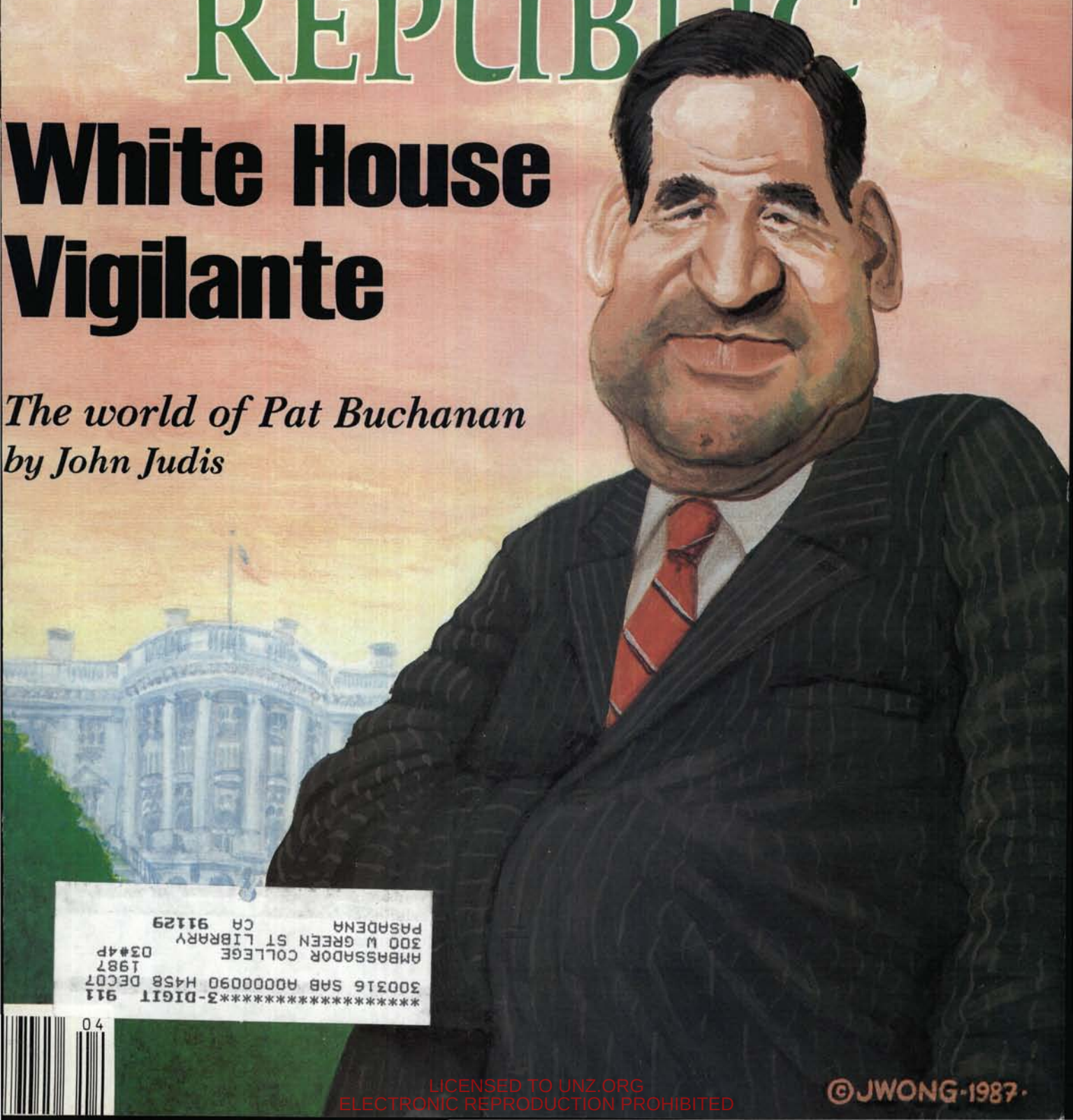
by John Judis



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TRB®

FROM WASHINGTON

INFO GRIDLOCK

In France more than two-and-a-half million people have a little computer screen and keyboard connected to their telephones. They use this system, called Minitel, to look up phone numbers, check their bank balances, make blind dates, go shopping, or find a job, among 3,000 other services. The French make 47 million "videotext" calls a month, compared to 500,000 on rudimentary systems here in the United States.

This is the information revolution you've been hearing so much about, usually summarized unappealingly as "computers talking to one another." The business and industrial applications are even more radical than the consumer uses. It's hard to talk about this stuff without sounding like one of those corporate-image commercials on the Sunday news shows, but it really will change the way we all live and work. Getting on top of this revolution is vital to (. . .watch out—here comes the first big political buzz phrase of 1987 . . .) "international competitiveness."

So why is the revolution coming to France before it comes to the United States? The answer goes back three years to the boldest experiment in industrial restructuring in the history of capitalism, engineered by the Reagan Justice Department—the breakup of AT&T. The former telephone monopoly was split into eight companies: a scaled-down AT&T to manage the long-distance and manufacturing businesses, and seven new companies to run local phone systems around the country.

The new AT&T lost its monopoly but was liberated to compete in new fields. The "Baby Bells" enjoy a government-granted phone monopoly but can't go into long-distance, manufacturing, or "information services." In the wonderful hermetic argot of communications regulation, the "arbocks" are limited to "pots" under the "emefjay." Translation: the "regional Bell operating companies" (RBOCs) are limited to "plain old telephone service" (POTS) under the "modified final judgment" (MFJ).

I think the breakup of the world's largest private monopoly was a wise and courageous move. Attempts by Democratic politicians to exploit public nostalgia for old "Ma Bell" are more than a little ironic, given that these same politicians like to rail against excessive corporate power. The problem is that the breakup left no one in a position to build a complete data network through the telephone system, like the one they have in France (and similar ones being developed in Canada, England, Japan—of course—and elsewhere).

The local phone companies, which represent about half the U.S. telecommunications industry, are banned from "information services" by the breakup agreement. Meanwhile the other half of the industry—including AT&T, IBM, and other national high-tech companies—is excluded from providing "end-to-end" service because the Baby Bells have a monopoly on the final connection. This local monopoly is fiercely protected by state regulators, most of whom are notoriously in the pocket of the phone company.

The AT&T breakup agreement provides for a review every three years. The first review is about to start. It will be conducted by U.S. District Judge Harold Greene who, under our system of letting judges run everything, has functioned as America's communications czar since the Justice Department's lawsuit against AT&T first landed in his lap. The various interests are girding for battle.

The Baby Bells would like to enter information services and other glitzy areas. The more visionary companies among them realize that their monopoly on local phone service may be about as valuable as the monopoly once held by the railroads, if they're not allowed to expand into new technology. On the other hand, that monopoly is currently worth $80 billion, compared to $10 billion for the whole data-networking industry, so they're loath to give it up. AT&T's position, not unreasonably, is "a deal's a deal." The company agreed to the breakup on the understanding that its offspring wouldn't come back to haunt it. On the other hand, AT&T, IBM, et al. wouldn't mind being free to wire up hotels, office buildings, apartments, and other groups of local customers. As one federal communications commissioner recently summarized the state of play: "Everybody would like to be deregulated, but nobody thinks anybody else should be deregulated."

A third important group of players is the newspaper industry. One almost certain victim of videotext will be newspaper classified ads—a huge profit center for most papers. Thanks to heavy lobbying by newspaper publishers, the breakup agreement forbids both the Baby Bells *and* AT&T (for seven years) from getting into videotext. Naturally, the publishers wish to see no monkeying around with this agreement at all. If you find yourself reading an editorial in your local newspaper over the next few months warning of an "information monopoly" if phone companies are allowed to enter this field, don't forget to ask yourself how many competing newspapers there are in your town.

The logical solution is to finish the job started three years ago: let the Baby Bells go after any new business they want, but take away their monopoly on local phone service. In a competitive environment, it's unlikely that any company will be able to re-establish the kind of monopoly power the old AT&T once had. Political resistance to this solution will come from Republicans hesitant, on "federalism" grounds, to trample on the prerogatives of state regulators, and from Democrats suspicious that competition for business customers will lead to higher rates for consumers. But the quickest way to bring on the "information revolution" is to let everyone battle it out, no holds barred.

Of course you could also draw the opposite lesson from the French example. It's a classic exercise in what they call *dirigisme*. The phone company is a state-owned monopoly. The information revolution is force-fed. Needless to say, Japan also is taking a centralized approach. Maybe the AT&T breakup was a mistake after all, and at the worst possible time. Should we turn back before we compound the error?

In a word, no. The key to "international competitiveness" (buzz, buzz) is not slavish imitation of our rivals, but playing to our own strengths. We will never organize our society for productive efficiency as well as the Japanese. We will never achieve the cowlike submission to central authority of the French. Our strength—our "comparative advantage," in the classic language of trade theory—is in what Keynes called "animal spirits": the ferocious, chaotic, imaginative, buccaneering aspects of capitalism. Our best hope is to charge ahead.

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CORRESPONDENCE

SUEZ EYEWITNESS

To the editors:

Henry Fairlie says it was an isolationist-minded America that did not consult its British, French, and Israeli allies in the period leading up to the 1956 invasion of Suez ("Ike at Suez," December 8). It seemed the other way around to most of us at the time. Be that as it may and be as they may Mr. Fairlie's notions of how splendidly better everything would be in the Middle East had the invasion succeeded, let me add a footnote or two.

President Eisenhower did not feel contempt for Anthony Eden, and I don't think he treated Eden that way. He regarded Eden as an old friend. Dulles, however, did disdain Eden, whom he thought to be weak. I heard Dulles on the subject in his own house.

When everything was thoroughly screwed up in the attack on Egypt, Eisenhower telephoned Eden. (Dulles was in his sickbed.) Ike told Eden that he simply could not stand by and see the Atlantic alliance fall apart. He said to Eden approximately this, "Get the Frenchman [Premier Guy Mollet] and fly here tonight. Tomorrow from the steps of the White House the three of us will announce an armistice in Suez and reaffirm our solidarity." From all I could learn at the time, Eisenhower did this on his own initiative.

Eden, close to physical collapse, was re-energized. He called Mollet and said he had some "grandes nouvelles." Mollet snorted in disbelief. No, said Eden, the president has just called me and he wants us to join him there immediately. Mollet said he would cancel dinner that night with his mother to fly to the British south coast and join Eden for the trans-Atlantic trip.

An hour or two later, as I was told the story by an intimate of Mollet's, Eden called the Frenchman back and in tones of total despair said the trip was off. Eisenhower had called Eden a second time and said he had changed his mind.

I could not establish it, but I had little doubt that Dulles, however ill, had been tipped off and changed Ike's mind.

ERIC SEVAREID
Washington, D.C.

When babies boomed, Kinsey reported, and rock got rolling.

The peaceful, prosperous Fifties—they were high times indeed. Now William O'Neill, the author of *Coming Apart*, explores Fifties politics and popular culture, reappraising such postwar phenomena as "automania" and the H-bomb, Elvis Presley and Adlai Stevenson, "The Honeymooners" and the Kinsey report, the decline of Hollywood and the shock of Sputnik.

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THANKS, GM

To the editors:

We have a small wrecking yard with two quite reputable mechanics. All of us have read James K. Glassman's "The Wreck of General Motors" (December 29) and readily agree that someone other than engineers and mechanics must be making the decisions at General Motors.

From abundant experience we have learned that late-model GM car and truck parts, from the 5.7 diesel engines to the front-wheel drive axles to the electrical systems and steering columns, are very profitable to us. Not only can our mechanics make a living from repairing GM products, but a fair portion of our sales derives from new and rebuilt GM R-4 air conditioner compressors, cruise controls, blower motors, and windshield wiper motors. Once superior and durable parts such as the turbo 350 and 400 transmissions, the 260, 307, and 350 Olds engines, and the 350 Chev engine have been discontinued, and in their place we are getting the 200 and 700 overdrive transmissions, the 200 3-speed transmission, and the Buick V-6 231 engine—all weak and unreliable, but which keep us busily employed.

Perhaps those employees finding themselves out of jobs from the closing of GM plants can retrain as mechanics and parts men and women. Business is good here, thanks to General Motors. Please don't go back, H. Ross Perot!

MARSHALL R. BOX
President, Box Auto Salvage, Inc.
Midland, Texas

CONTRADICTORY DEMOCRACY

To the editors:

Your "El Norte" commentary (December 22) makes reference to the fact that Oliver North is the "embodiment of a policy that pursues democracy abroad while trampling on it at home." Though I would agree that there is an almost willful disdain for the real meaning of democracy on the part of some of the members and former members of this administration, I find it almost silly to call the Iranamok policy one of pursuing democracy abroad.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
JANUARY 26, 1987

AMERICA'S ISSUE

The Environmental Protection Agency recently announced that the tap water in one of five American homes may contain dangerous amounts of lead. As a result, millions of people may be at risk of brain damage and other serious health problems. What remedy did the Reagan administration propose? Lawrence Jensen of the EPA went on television to suggest that people complain to their local water company, and avoid using hot water from the tap in the meantime. The lead problem, added Jensen, "should be addressed from both sides, from government at the one side. But there are also things which the individual can do."

This friendly advice from one of the government officials responsible for keeping America's drinking water clean was the reductio ad absurdum of Reaganite teachings about self-reliance and limited government. There aren't "two sides" to the problem. The government and "the individual" aren't equally responsible for ensuring the safety of the nation's water supply. Contaminated tap water is the ultimate example of something individuals can't do anything about. If the EPA and other authorities aren't supposed to take the lead in protecting the drinking water supply, what are they supposed to do?

Yet Jensen's musings on lead were perfectly consistent with the administration's record on environmental issues. That record is one of consistent delay ("study" acid rain, but do nothing about it), neglect (scale back EPA's budget to 1976 levels in real terms), and outright destruction (step up—or even subsidize—mining, tree cutting, and oil drilling on public lands). Administration policies are based on one of Reaganism's pet conceits: that environmentalists are a fringe group of anti-growth elitists. What Middle America really wants are jobs and industrial growth, however many poisonous byproducts that growth may generate. The mainstream resents paying taxes for the granola set's hiking trails.

In fact, Reagan's ideology indisputably places *him* on the fringe. He is totally out of step with Congress. To cite one particularly glaring example, last fall the president pocket-vetoed the Clean Water Act, which had passed both the House and the Republican-controlled Senate unanimously. Now, in a belated effort to save face, he is offering a substitute measure, but even that may well be too weak to stave off an embarrassing rejection by both the opposition and his own party.

More important, Reagan is out of step with public opinion. Middle-class folks, after all, are the ones who live next door to smokestacks and toxic waste dumps; one of their favorite escapes is a vacation to a national park or national forest. Polls consistently show that a huge majority of Americans want government to do more to clamp down on polluters and protect wilderness areas. In a 1985 *Time* poll, two-thirds of the public specifically repudiated the president's view, saying they would pay higher prices—and sacrifice jobs—in exchange for tighter controls on pollution.

Far from being an anxiety of the effete, environmentalism is America's issue. It could be a winning issue for the Democrats. One of the party's main tasks between now and 1988 is to reconstruct the broad following it once enjoyed among middle-class Americans. Many Democrat-

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ic leaders seem to believe that one way to do that is to offer voters what Reagan offered them: small government, no regulation, "private-sector solutions." The public's views on the environment demonstrate the problem with this kind of thinking. There is no anti-government consensus. In fact, there could be a consensus in favor of the right kind of affirmative government, especially if the Democrats help to build it.

The country has benefited from economic deregulation in the airline, trucking, and telecommunications industries. Those measures put the public's interest in lower prices and greater consumer choice ahead of the interests of industries that depended on subsidies, or on government-enforced protection from the discipline of free competition. Environmental deregulation, however, does the opposite. It helps a self-interested elite (namely polluters) at the expense of everyone else.

Health, safety, and environmental regulations are forms of government intervention worth paying for. They benefit the majority of Americans, who would otherwise end up bearing the costs, both economic and physical, imposed by pollution. Only by mustering the resources of the national government can citizens be protected. Two years ago, the EPA cataloged 39 pollutants in the nation's air that may be causing 2,000 additional cancer deaths a year. Only six of these pollutants have been regulated—just one of them by Reagan's EPA. If a gang of terrorists had announced plans to kill 2,000 Americans, would the administration have adopted a similar posture of slow deliberation?

In recent years many Democrats have lost sight of the real meaning of their party's traditional support for activist, affirmative government. They have too often squan-

THE ZEITGEIST CHECKLIST

BY CHARLES PAUL FREUND

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1. THE RUST CURTAIN

Glasnost cum China. Sakharov's remarks are now being reported in some of the Soviet press, Chinese students have elevated a VOA reporter to local stardom, and there's trouble in Kazakhstan. This plays well for the right, and for the left too, if one blends in French student upheavals and Iranamok (it's been done). Efforts to perceive a grand historical flourish are probably only just beginning.

2. ENTER THE DRAGON

Budget. The deficit dragon is fireless and inside a net. True, there's a trillion-dollar budget, but the president has promised to examine all government invoices. In the old military v. social spending struggle, it will be interesting to see how "compassion" issues will play in Reagan's twilight.

3. CORRIDOR OF POWER

Amtrak collision. The Amtrak tragedy calls to attention just how busy the D.C.-Boston corridor is, and that, for budgetary reasons, Amtrak must lease its tracks to slow-moving freight traffic. Questions about the wisdom of such a policy collide with annual budget proposals for undercutting the system.

4. THE EYE OF THE STORM

Iranamok. In the absence of new revelations, and the exhaustion of all possible exploitable angles on hand, attention shifted to what is going to happen, and how it would and should happen. Having muddled through to this point, the White House has reached a stage of political weakness it seems willing to live with, and will dismantle itself only gradually.

5. GENERATION FLAP

Sixties-think. In the Reaganite heyday, journalists regretted lack of Vietnam service and Stallone and Norris could refight the war. Now come a slew of movies (*Platoon* and *Hanoi Hilton* among them) to reinterpret the war less glamorously; *Do You Believe in Magic?* (a book about the return of the period's values); and Abbie Hoffman back to the front page. Maybe last fall's heralding of a new "We Decade" (ZC, October 27) was on to something.

6. GRAND OL' OPRAH

Race relations. Just as Howard Beach put race under the microscope, Oprah Winfrey's talk show became the biggest-grossing program in the history of first-run syndication. Meanwhile, Cosby's show coasts along in prime time, and Eddie Murphy's new comedy is the leading current movie. But black celebrity remains meaningless in daily terms at the culture's low end, where racial problems are most visible, even though media consumption is most voracious there.

7. TWILIGHT TIME

Reagan. The president's health problems got him some respite, though even his most fervent supporters agree that, at the least, he'll never be the same. Rumors abound that Reagan will eventually cite health problems and *retire*—defusing the White House crisis, handing the mantle to Bush (and curtail growing GOP fratricide), and letting the country get on with its business.

8. BABY MAKES FOUR

Surrogate motherhood. The Stern-Whitehead case, an amazing combination of Solomon and "Let's Make a Deal," almost makes one long for the heady days of jazz journalism and the *New York Graphic.* Still, the motherhoods-in-conflict, male desire to carry on the family name, and life-threatening illness play above the fold in *USA Today*, and are headed for the p.m. talk shows and TV movies.

9. A COURSE IN HUMAN EVENTS

The Constitution. Warren Burger has now endorsed 1,400 projects related to the Constitutional Bicentennial, including the likelihood the document will appear on fast-food placemats and in hotel drawers. Fifty million copies are coming, along with commercial promotions, TV specials, and one (so far) ballet. Left out: the scholarly community, which a decade ago argued that this was the nation's *real* bicentennial.

10. NORTHERN LIGHTS

Curiosa. A "UFO" sighting by JAL pilots over Alaska is getting surprising ink; UFOs have been moribund for years, with a similar case over Brazil a year ago being laughed off. "Ramtha" has popped into the news, and even astrology has picked up a little steam in recent weeks. Occult interest corresponds to political insecurity.

*Item resurfaces in the Zeitgeist after at least one week's absence.

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dered this heritage in the defense of protectionism and corporate welfare. Their main method of winning support from the middle class has been to purchase it through transfer payments like Social Security and farm subsidies.

Environmental protection, however, represents the kind of government action on which Democrats have largely not gone astray—and which the mainstream enthusiastically supports. Despite the Reagan administration's anti-government preachings, Americans have recognized that a healthful environment is one of their government's basic responsibilities—along with economic prosperity, education, and national security. In one major Senate race last year, concern over toxic waste made the difference, contributing to Democrat Alan Cranston's victory over Republican Ed Zschau in California. If the party wants to reap similar benefits when the White House is at stake in 1988, it should make a bigger government role in environmental protection a central theme of its campaign.

Office Politics

"The Church can sleep and feed at once," said T. S. Eliot. In the ordinary course of things, the Vatican tries to pretend that the State of Israel does not exist, as if to wish away the theologically intolerable notion of a restored Jewish commonwealth (and meanwhile appease the Arab nations, with whom it shares the belief that this commonwealth is intolerable). That's what this business of Roman Catholic churchmen not meeting Israeli officials in their offices is all about. But the Church does have interests—and property—in Israel, and particularly in Jerusalem. Its representatives, therefore, meet regularly on Church business with Jerusalem's mayor, and they meet with him in his office.

If the Church has a material grievance against the Israeli or city administrations, this would be news to everyone. The immemorial problem of free access to holy sites is now a thing of history. During Jordan's 19-year rule over Jerusalem, Christian churches were forbidden to buy land or renovate their buildings. That, too, became history soon after the Six-Day War. The two decades since have been a boom period for the churches, especially the Roman Catholic churches. But this apparently counts for nothing to those who worry about eternal questions in the Roman Curia. When Cardinal O'Connor of New York decided to visit Israel, the Vatican extended its usual interdict against formal meetings with Israeli authorities to include Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek.

If Rome had had its way, O'Connor would have traveled 7,000 miles and seen no Israeli political leaders. But the storm the Vatican's intervention provoked was greater than expected. At first it relented about the mayor, and then—as an earnest of something-or-other—permitted a formal meeting with the minister of religion. O'Connor ultimately met with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres as well—at his home. And he met with the president of Israel, Chaim Herzog, in the study at the presidential residence, which happens (like our own president's) to be his office as well. Church spokesmen insisted that this was a home visit. O'Connor said he "would be terribly disappointed if I were visiting an office." Maybe his doubts would be placated if they had met in the bedroom.

If these doctrinal subtleties are beyond you (as they are beyond us), you can take comfort that they probably are beyond Cardinal O'Connor as well. He is not a theologian. Outside of a short stint in Scranton, his entire career has been in the military. Nor is he a historian. We don't know what made him think that the search for peace in the Middle East could be a cornerstone of his ministry, but it certainly was not any deep knowledge about the region. At one point he admitted that he "can't talk intelligently about diplomatic relations." Having read some of his recent observations, we agree with this assessment.

Yet there are a few essentials that even someone who has forsaken grand assertions about Israel and the Arabs should know. O'Connor says that he doesn't "know what the Church did or did not do" to save Jews in Nazi Europe. It is a subject on which he might easily get educated; and he will find that the most charitable judgment is that it did not do much. This is only one reason why Jews so much resent the pariah status that the Vatican's diplomatic *cordon sanitaire* seeks to impose on the Jewish nation.

THE CARDINAL prayed at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum that is approached via a tree-lined "avenue of the righteous," mandated by Israeli law to commemorate those gentiles who risked their own lives to save imperiled Jews. To the honor of the Church, there are nuns and priests and many pious individual Catholics among the approximately 1,300 men and women whose bravery is marked by a tree of life. Even acknowledging that history never really captures all (or even most) of its heroes, it must have occurred to the cardinal, as it occurs to children who have just seen the rather restrained and low-keyed evidence mustered at Yad Vashem, to reflect on the enormity of the evil and on the sparse numbers of the genuinely righteous to memorialize.

Having to face the press and say something intelligent after stepping out of the Holocaust memorial is perhaps a challenge no person should be expected to meet. But O'Connor certainly did not pass it. Amid all kinds of banalities (such as comparing the gas chambers to abortions), and perhaps even with the best of intentions, he declared that the Holocaust "may be an enormous gift that Judaism has given to the world," teaching "the sacredness and dignity of every human person." Judaism did not give the Holocaust to the world. The Holocaust was not, in fact, given to the world but to the Jews, and to others labeled subhuman such as Gypsies and homosexuals. It was given by Germany with barely a murmur of reproach from the Church in Rome. We may now have in Cardinal O'Connor's observation an inadvertent vindication of Pius XII who, in his wisdom and beneficence, was silent so that the noble lesson of Jewish suffering might not be kept from the world. □

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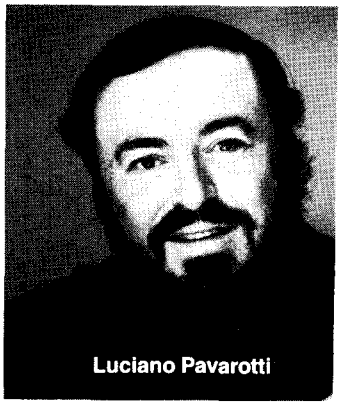

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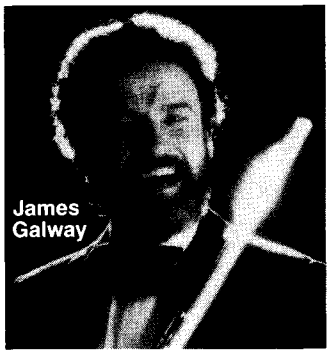

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NOTEBOOK

□ MORE MIDEAST CONUNDRUMS: While the Roman Catholic Church struggles with the theological question "When is an office not an office?" the readers of the *New York Times* face the puzzle "When is a capital not a capital?" Like it or not, Jerusalem has been the capital of Israel since the founding of the state in 1949. Some nations that don't like this put their embassies in Tel Aviv, but even these ambassadors go to Jerusalem to present their credentials. Yet in a recent column, *Times* columnist Tom Wicker made two references to the government of Israel as "Tel Aviv," as one might refer to the government of the United States as "Washington." "Tel Aviv's failure . . . ," and so on. Would the *Times* copy desk allow a writer to refer to the capital of Russia as "St. Petersburg"? Would the *Times*, which recently changed its spelling of China's capital from "Peking" to "Beijing," permit a columnist to indicate his ideological preference by selecting the Kuomintang's preferred spelling of "Peiping"?

□ BOARD CALLS FOR GROUP:

Ethics Commission Urges Cuomo To Form Panel

—*New York Times*, December 19, page A1

Panel on Ethics Urges Cuomo to Form Commission

—page D20

□ CORPOCRACY WATCH: Remember Mary Cunningham, the corporate sweetheart? She's the one who charged sexism when people attributed her rocket through the ranks at Bendix Corporation to a romantic connection with chairman William Agee. Then she married him. Cunningham's next business triumph was as director of strategic planning for Seagram, where she recommended a major expansion into the wine business. In 1984 Seagram bought several large vineyards, making it the second biggest wine producer after Gallo. Last month it was reported that Seagram's wine businesses are up for sale. Turns out they're a drain on the company's profits.

□ WHAT NEXT? "Two weeks ago, Stephen W. Hawking of Cambridge University in England, a prominent proponent of the view that time would run backward in a shrinking universe, announced that he had changed his mind. Recent research had led him to conclude that time would still march forward, even if the universe began to contract. . . ." ("Is There a Past in the Future?" the *Times*, December 30). But how do we know that time isn't already going backward, and that this scientist isn't actually going to change his mind the other way in two weeks? Get a reporter on it.

□ POLISH SAUSAGE: In our editorial last week, "Rumblings" (January 19), the reference to Polish October in the first paragraph was meant to recall the events of 1956, not 1981.

POSTCARD NEW YORK

MIA AT THE MLA

IT WAS two days after Christmas, and the escalators of the vast new Marriott Marquis in Times Square were jammed with structuralists, deconstructionists, semioticians, language-acquisition specialists (I think these are teachers of foreign languages), and plain old-fashioned English professors. I was on my way to that annual ritual, the Modern Language Association convention.

For three days, the eerily modern Marriott, with its soaring 45-story atrium, its glass-cupola elevators plunging up and down, its dazzling chandeliers, was a tower of Babel. Strewn about on tables were brochures advertising MFA programs ("Writing can be discouraging . . . and wonderful"); calls for papers from the Hemingway Society; announcements for meetings of the Samuel Beckett Society and the D. H. Lawrence Society; a dinner arranged by the Joseph Conrad Society at La Grillade; a cash bar arranged by the Marxist Literary Society (in the Odets Room, yet). Perusing the newsletter of the Virginia Woolf Society, I learned from a recent survey of members that "of those who attended our parties, 29 enjoyed them and two did not." Loitering amid this literary pandemonium, I thought of my grandmother's name for the marathon gossip sessions her Russian cronies used to hold on park benches in Rogers Park: the Blah-Blah Club.

Just reading over the program was an awesome task. How to choose among "Humor and Language Theories I: Sociolinguistic Applications" (which included a paper on "Pragmatic Dissonance in Greeting-Card Humor"), "Conversation and Catalyst: The Emergence of Talk in British and American Literary Culture," and so on? Finally I settled upon a subject that looked about as close to home as I was going to get: "New York City in American Literature Since 1945." I was especially keen to hear the talk on "*Bright Lights, Big City*, Back to the 'Burbs: Jay McInerney's Encounter with the Other" by one Dana Brand.

Seated in the back of a small, sparsely populated conference room, I found myself listening not to some abstruse gloss on this cultural phenomenon and book ("soon to be a major motion picture," the speaker reminded his audience), but to a lucid critique of McInerney's narrative voice. *Bright Lights, Big City* is "an exceptionally nasty book, a series of push-button slanders and smirks," argued Brand, a hefty, red-bearded fellow who looked suspiciously like a writer. It makes fun of gays, blacks, people who live in New Jersey, and other minorities; it betrays a snobbish contempt for "the dorky and the nerdy"; it ignores the problems of New York exemplified by the racial unrest in Howard Beach. In short, *Bright Lights, Big City* is "reactionary," an instance of "literary gentrification."

I thought this was pretty good, though whenever the speaker disapprovingly quoted passages of the novel that were "supposed to make us laugh," the audience laughed. "I

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hope I've made you as upset about the popularity of this book as I am," thundered Brand. He didn't; any novelist who can make a lot of money is entitled to it, as far as I'm concerned. But he did make me wonder if this display of straight talk was an anomaly (I noticed that Dana Brand was one of the few participants without an academic affiliation) or if it portended a new worldliness in English studies. The MLA has never quite recovered from Edmund Wilson's devastating attack on its prissy methods and editing procedures in the *New York Review of Books* some 20 years ago, and obsessive pedantry is still much in evidence. But there was a more than deferential nod this year in the direction of popular culture. From "Eddie and May's Old Man: Theatricality in Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love*" to "Hannah Cooks the Turkey: Woody Allen's Accommodations of Postmodern Irony," the 1986 MLA convention was definitely up-to-date.

THERE WAS plenty of practical business to be conducted—not only the business of looking for jobs, but the presentation of minority grievances. I took in a panel on "The Impact of Homo- and Lesbophobia on Academic Careers" that reported on the discrimination gays suffer in university life; and one on "Quality Teaching with Just Remuneration" that explored the gritty world of part-time teaching ("Out of the Bus and into the Bullpen: The Adjunct Life at Queens"). Thus did the real world intrude on the world of Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* and Dryden's *Cleomenes*.

Literature was the putative focus, but politics had the floor—left politics, as Hilton Kramer remarked in a stormy session on "Democracy and Empire." There were conferences on Afro-American literature, black literature, black American literature, black women in literature, Indians, Amerindians, the Spanish Civil War, the Hollywood Ten. Feminism was a notably strong presence. You could attend sessions on "Feminist Responses to the Eighteenth-Century Canon," "Male Feminist Voices Inscribed Within a Patriarchal Language," "The Repressions of Psychoanalytic Discourse: Lesbians, Mothers, and Others in Literature and Theory," and many, many more.

This "left-liberal tilt" is nothing new. In the late '60s, the MLA was as insurrectionary as SDS. The 1968 MLA convention in New York nearly provoked a riot—the Little Bourgeois Cultural Revolution of MLA, as it later came to be known. There were teach-ins, vigils, demonstrations, culminating in the arrival of the New York City Tac Squad and the arrest of Professor Louis Kampf for distributing a poster of Eldridge Cleaver with the inscription "I got my job through the MLA." The academic left has been splintered since then, isolated in special interest groups. One of my journalistic colleagues on the MLA beat described this Balkanization as breaking down constituencies by "gender and body size." (Sure enough, there was a session entitled "Seizing Power: Gender, Representation, and Body Scale.") Still, the general drift is clear. T. S. Eliot, the reigning figure in literary discourse during the 1940s, when the New Criticism was paramount, was largely ignored this year; no one evinced much interest in Pound or Yeats or Wyndham Lewis. Why? Because the modernist tradition in literature was reactionary; the very writers now regarded as heretical, the innovators of a revolution in literary style, were elitist to the core. No wonder they were ignored.

The one dissenting voice I heard was Gerald Graff, a professor at Northwestern and the author of a very intelligent book called *Literature Against Itself*. Graff has always been suspicious of the various deconstructionist methodologies that insist upon the premise—to simplify drastically—that every interpretation of the text is an ideological act. For Graff, this "textual leftism" is an evasion of responsibility, "a politics of cynicism rather than of social justice."

Graff was followed by Michael Ryan of Northeastern University, who offered up a "deconstructive account" of a poll he'd conducted purporting to interpret the responses of different constituencies to a number of contemporary films. Among his findings: *Terms of Endearment* made female viewers who earned less than $30,000 a year "question conservative roles for women," and "Far more men than women thought *Dirty Harry* was great." People see in films only what they want to see, Ryan concluded—which kind of puts the deconstructionist out of a job. Precisely, I agreed, heading for the lobby.

Wasn't it strange, I remarked to Morris Dickstein, a professor of English at Queens College and well-known critic of the old *Partisan Review* school, where texts are texts and books are books, that so many professors espoused right-on (as opposed to right-wing) politics these days? "Academic life is a time warp," he reminded me. "What happens in the world in the '80s will hit here about the year 2000."

TWO HOURS later, I thought *I* was in a time warp. There on the stage of the Broadway South Ballroom was Allen Ginsberg, chanting that hoary classic "Howl." Dressed in a dark suit and tie, the former teacher at the Naropa School of Disembodied Poetics in Boulder, Colorado, now a tenured professor of English at Brooklyn College, accompanied by a seraphic long-haired boy with a guitar, shouted and sang like a grizzled Dylan. When he launched into "Do the Meditation Rock" ("If you can't think straight and you don't know who to call / it's never too late to do nothing at all"), I was ready to drop out and head for Berkeley. And when he read a sad, eloquent sequel to "Kaddish," his great poem about the death of his mother, I remembered that poetry could actually be moving.

Ginsberg wrapped things up with a "community sing," repeating the last line of the "Nurse's Song" from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in his lovely basso voice until, shyly and hesitantly, the semioticians and deconstructionists and assistant professors in search of a job were singing along. When it was over, they gave him a standing ovation. Maybe there's something to be said for the academic life after all.

JAMES ATLAS

James Atlas is a contributing editor of *Vanity Fair*. His last book was *The Great Pretender* (Atheneum).

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Joker of '88.

THE DOLE MOMENT

NEARLY TWO YEARS ago Senator Robert Dole got a phone call from his least favorite Republican, Representative Jack Kemp. Let's quit zinging each other in public, suggested Kemp. It's hurting both of our chances for the GOP presidential nomination in 1988. What prompted the call was a rapid-fire exchange of barbs. Dole had quipped—actually, he bought the one-liner from a professional jokewriter—that Kemp liked tax reform because he was counting on a tax break for hair spray. Kemp responded in mock sadness over the fire at Dole's library: both books were destroyed. That was tit-for-tat. Earlier Dole had stung Kemp with a good news, bad news joke about supply-side economics, Kemp's ideological passion. The good news was that a busload of supply-side economists had plunged over a cliff and everyone was killed. The bad news was that three seats on the bus were empty.

Despite his quip advantage, Dole agreed to the no-zing rule. But it's a hard rule to follow. Of course it doesn't apply to Vice President George Bush. At an Iowa dinner a few months ago, Dole declared that Bush was one of the greatest veeps of all time. "Let's keep him there," Dole added. Some Bushies in the crowd booed. As to Kemp, Dole was angered when the congressman's press secretary, John Buckley, charged last December that the senator was trampling on "Reagan's corpse" to gain politically from the Iran scandal. Doesn't the rule apply to press secretaries, too? Dole asked. Well, after discussions, it now does. Still, Dole can't resist a good shot, especially if it scores a political point. Eager to win over the party's dominant right wing, Dole insists that "conservatives can't find much fault with me. Busing, right-to-life, I say, you guys should keep looking. You'll find something. Look at some of the [pro-] labor votes Jack Kemp has cast. They'll curl your hair."

This is Dole's moment. President Reagan is badly wounded by the Iran scandal, and so is Bush. Not only has Dole emerged as Bush's chief rival for the nomination, but he's still ascending, while Bush continues to plummet. Dole didn't manage this by overhauling his style. True, he's not quite the reckless slasher he once was, but he remains a clever, smart, pragmatic, funny, acerbic politician who gets by on his wits. Nor did he do anything in particular to touch off his sudden rise—no dramatic speech, milking of an issue, etc. Dole was simply "positioned for some upward movement if Bush slipped," says Republican consultant Eddie Mahe. He was the only Republican candidate besides Bush who is nationally known. Dole soared by default.

John Sears, the Republican strategist and part-time Dole adviser, has a more complex explanation. Dole, he says, is practically every Republican voter's second choice for the 1988 nomination. "Usually that's not worth a damn," Sears concedes. "It's first-line support that counts. If you don't have it, you're going nowhere. You can't turn second-tier support into anything." Except that throughout 1986, Sears says, Bush campaigned avidly, forcing people to make a tentative judgment on him. They did, and Bush lost support. Suddenly Dole's second-line support "began to be more worthwhile." Dole went up in opinion polls, moving within five points of Bush nationally (20 percent to 25 percent) in a new CNN poll and opening a 28 percent to 25 percent lead over Bush in Iowa in a *Des Moines Register* survey. But, cautions Sears, Dole's gain in the polls may be illusory. "It isn't first-strength support yet," he adds.

Still, it sure beats the near-obscurity that was widely predicted for Dole after Republicans lost the Senate last November and he slipped from majority to minority leader. "A lot of people said, 'That's the end of Bob Dole,' " Dole says. "He can't raise money. He's a member of the minority. He's finished. My view is we're going to have 45 fairly unified [Republican] senators. We're going to find ourselves in a position from time to time when the administration is going to have a view, Democrats have a view, and we're going to be called on to work it out." That would put Dole in the catbird seat, with maximum media attention. And he may get exactly that. Besides, given his accessibility, wit, irreverence, and quotability, Dole is a reporter's dream.

The trouble, though, is that the Dole moment is artificial. He didn't create it, and he may not be able to sustain it past the early months of 1987. To make himself a stronger presidential contender, Dole has needed to do several things, and he hasn't done any of them yet. The first is to draw significant conservative support. You can't win the Republican nomination without organized conservative backing any more than you can win the Democratic nomination without liberal support. Dole has warmed up to New Right leaders such as Paul Weyrich and Richard Dingman, but they are still leery of him. He's helped them on some issues—preserving the tax deductibility of conservative foundations, for example—but not on others. Last summer Dole gave Weyrich the impression that he would appoint a New Right figure as his deputy chief of staff. Weyrich submitted three names, which were rejected. Finally, without notifying Weyrich, Dole picked a deputy from a Republican congressman's staff. Weyrich was miffed. For all Dole's wooing, he's unpersuaded.

DOLE'S RELENTLESS courtship of the right has a too-clever quality. One of his tactics is to associate himself with a conservative position without committing himself to it. In an interview in *Conservative Digest* a year ago, he noted that Reagan got no applause during his address to Congress after the November 1985 summit when he suggested opening up American research centers to Soviets. "It brought home to me the fact that even though we were pleased with his summit success, there is no enthusiasm to start sharing our technology with the Soviet Union." Note that Dole said only that sharing technology was unpopular, not that he wouldn't do it. Dole's attempt to appear

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arch-conservative even drew an amused barb from Senator Teddy Kennedy, who twitted Dole on their daily show on Mutual Radio. "Your tilt to the right isn't even convincing, Bob," Kennedy said. "You've done too much good on civil rights and food for the hungry to be credible to those right-wingers."

In truth, Dole's problem is more fundamental than a lack of credibility with conservatives. According to William Schneider of the American Enterprise Institute, presidential candidates must have pragmatic and passionate sides. Dole is all pragmatism, scorning the role of ideas and ideology in politics. I asked Dole what issues he passionately believes in, and his answer was cool and measured. "I think we've sort of led the way in dealing with the deficit," he said. "[I] passionately believe in good, old-fashioned Republican economics that you shouldn't spend more than you take in. 1988 is going to be a tough year for all of us with $3 trillion in debt out there. It was $1 trillion in 1980. I think we've made the hard choices." Maybe Dole is right about the deficit, but this isn't soaring campaign stuff, as Walter Mondale found out in 1984. Beyond the deficit, what stirs Dole? Nothing special, it turns out. "It's one thing to make the statements," he said. "It's another to pass the votes. It's another thing to provide leadership. It's my view that in 1988 people are looking for leadership." Ideas? Oh, yes, "they're always looking for ideas. We're all going to have a lot of ideas in 1988, I suppose."

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Sears says Dole must "make the transition" from legislative deal-maker to Republican visionary if he's going to win the nomination. "You can't make it just on your experience" as a congressional leader, Sears contends. "You have to show yourself in a different way." Sears says Dole can do it, but hasn't yet. For one thing, Dole tends to micro-manage, causing Sears to tell associates he wonders if Dole has the discipline to concentrate on being a presidential candidate and leave mini-decisions to aides. On this count, Dole's quixotic bid for the 1980 nomination, pursued while also seeking Senate re-election, was not encouraging. He spurned good advice. His campaign manager, Thomas Bell, urged him to drop out of the presidential race in 1979. Dole said no; then, after Bell quit, refused to pay him for services rendered. Dole relented when Bell threatened a lawsuit. Now Dole admits that running for the 1980 nomination was "a mistake of judgment."

The most important change Dole needs to make is more personal, and perhaps that's not possible. As charming as he can be, Dole doesn't build what Stephen Bell, a Washington lobbyist and Dole fan, calls "an emotional bridge" to voters. He's aloof, revealing little of himself. In 1984 Republican senators backing a boost in spending for veterans recruited Dole, a disabled veteran with a paralyzed right arm, for a floor speech. They hoped he would personalize the issue by talking about his own experience of 39 months in the hospital recuperating from war wounds. But he didn't mention the subject. Rather than address a sensitive subject, Dole frequently finesses the matter with a quip. That gets a laugh, but it doesn't create a bond. A GOP senator says the reaction Dole elicits from Republican audiences is, "He was funny, but . . ."

I asked Dole if he had regrets or reservations about his performance as Gerald Ford's vice presidential running mate in 1976. It was in that race, and particularly in the televised debate with Mondale, that he got his reputation as a partisan slasher. He referred me to his speech to the Gridiron Club in 1978. The part on the 1976 race consisted of five jokes. His humor was self-deprecating. "I'll never forget the Dole-Mondale debate, and don't think I haven't tried," he said. And, "if you remember these debates, President Ford was supposed to take the high road and I was supposed to go for the jugular. And I did. My own." Funny, but isn't there more to Dole than this? Maybe not.

FRED BARNES

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A Reagan fan laments.

THE CASE AGAINST GLEE

THOSE OF US who are depressed at the political decline of Ronald Reagan oughtn't scold those who are delighted. They—TRB and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., plus any number of other Democrats who are still afraid to show their pleasure in public—have been convinced for years that Reagan's been getting away with a massive scam, and they're bursting with joy that his failings are being found out. His affliction is their vindication. Who among us, the depressed, would be any different if an object of our distrust were unmasked? Do I gloat when Daniel Ortega goes off to Moscow and shows the world what he really is? I do.

But there is still every reason to be depressed about what's happening to Reagan. On one level, we're watching a sad process of aging and decay. Two years ago, this was a pro at the top of his form. Even last year, when tax reform and military aid to the *contras* looked impossible, he won. His Bitburg trip was a bum idea, but Reagan made a great speech when he got there. Now the moxie is gone. The president has stumbled on a stone in the road and isn't able to recover his footing.

As scandals go, Iranamok isn't much—no Cabinet officers on the take, no presidential obstruction of justice, no black-bag jobs or assassination plots. The administration did wrong, but in defensible causes. It went soft, changed policies on arms sales to Iran, and tried to conceal the fact. But it did so to save American lives. It violated the spirit of a since-changed law forbidding aid to the *contras*—it's still not clear about the letter—in order to stop the spread of communism in the hemisphere.

A leader with vitality could defend his aims, admit his errors, replace those responsible, and carry on with his agenda. But Reagan seems befuddled by what's happening to him and apparently does not have any further agenda. Unless he can somehow rally, which will be difficult with the same old group of advisers around, we're likely to witness two years of executive reeling—a sad spectacle.

But it's worse because Reagan's been such a special president—the father figure who seemed to make adversity go away. He's been more than Eisenhower, whose job in the '50s was to keep things on an even keel. When Reagan arrived, after the tumultuous '60s and '70s, Americans were riddled with self-doubt. Jimmy Carter said—and much of the country's political and intellectual elite believed—that "inexorable forces of history" made it impossible for any president to govern effectively, for our "post-industrial economy" to escape zero-sum internal rivalry, and for the United States to get its way in international affairs.

Reagan did not repeal the forces of history, but he did restore the country's belief in itself and in the fundamental goodness of its values. Whatever one thinks about the merits of his tax, budget, and defense policies, he proved we didn't need constitutional changes or a parliamentary system for a president to get his program enacted.

TRB and others contend that Reagan only did the easy things with his vaunted leadership talents. I disagree. Along with Paul Volcker, he broke inflation and the divisive psychology that went with it. Those who now give Volcker all the credit are the same people who blamed Reagan for the 1982 recession. Reagan got workers to agree to wage restraints and still vote for him—not easy. Would that he had gotten corporate executives to do the same.

In 1980 it was widely believed that all the United States could do in the face of foreign adversaries was to cut a deal, never prevail. Grenada and Libya *were* easy operations, but they worked. If Reagan wants an arms deal with the Soviets, he can still get a better one than Salt II. Chalk that up to SDI.

More important than specific policies, Reagan's personality bespoke optimism and all-American good-guyness, and his success was a validation of American character. Surviving an assassination attempt and beating cancer, he seemed like an archetypal king—not just strong, but lucky. Altogether, Reagan had "magic" that seemed to guarantee the success of almost any enterprise he undertook. Even in policy disasters—like Lebanon—the magic worked to limit the damage to Reagan personally.

That was a problem as well as a gift. The magic was blinding. Now that it's worn off, his flaws are easier to see. Hubris may be one. Reagan may have come to believe in his own magic, turning legendary unconcern for details into near recklessness. How else to explain his never asking how the *contras* were being funded?

Certainly subordinates and supporters came to believe excessively in Reagan's magic. I confess, I did too. It bred intellectual laziness, an abandonment of critical edge, an impatience with carping from non-believers. Some subordinates seemed to confuse electoral mandates—reconfirmed constantly in opinion polls—as the mandate of history, or of heaven. How else could they sell arms to the Iranians and believe the fact would never leak?

OF ALL Reagan's acts of carelessness, the crowning one was his casual agreement to the 1985 job swap between chief of staff James Baker and Treasury Secretary Donald Regan. The biggest administrative decision of the second term seems to have been made in a matter of minutes.

Out with Baker went a pattern of hiring strong, smart, sometimes difficult deputies (David Stockman, Richard Darman, Edward Rollins), of paying close attention to detail, of willingness to buck Reagan's instincts (especially on tax cuts and defense budgets), and the ability to get along with Congress. In came a pattern of never questioning the president ("let Reagan be Reagan") and of hiring weak, compliant subordinates who never questioned Regan. Out of arrogance, Regan never listened to Congress or much other outside advice.

Besides character flaws, there were management flaws. Harvard professor Roger Porter, a former White House aide, observes that foreign policy never was subjected to

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"point exercises"—thorough, systematic debate and recasting of policy directives—as happened with domestic issues because of the budget, the Economic Report of the President, and the need to draft legislation.

Then, too, Porter says, foreign policy was carried out in "the great oral tradition" of fleeting conversations in hallways, rather than rigorous preparation of written options. To him, it's entirely plausible that Regan and former national security adviser Robert McFarlane can have conflicting accounts of how Iran arms sales got approved, and that there is no document around to sustain either account.

Unblinded by Reagan magic, one can see policy flaws too. This administration has cared not at all about blacks and has contributed to an upsurge in racial prejudice. Its economic achievements have been very Republican—controlling inflation, shifting wealth to the wealthy. What it hasn't done is produce a trickle-down effect: investment, R & D, productivity increases, greater competitiveness, and higher take-home pay. Up to now, workers and the middle class have ignored all this. That won't last. And in foreign policy, Reagan restored American strength, but could not figure out what to use it for. The good news is that since Reagan's magic has evaporated, we'll have no bad arms control deals or an invasion of Nicaragua.

Reagan's decline restores the reality principle. He's been a good leader, a political genius even, and he was on the right track for his time. He hasn't perpetrated a scam, as his laughing detractors claim. But he is, after all, an ordinary mortal in need of criticism. It's good to know that, but the truth still hurts.

MORTON KONDRACKE

Pat Buchanan takes matters into his own hands.

WHITE HOUSE VIGILANTE

BY JOHN B. JUDIS

If we have to drift into demagoguery, so be it—we owe them a few.

—Patrick J. Buchanan, July 1973

"I am intrigued by the idea of running for president," says Pat Buchanan, the at once genial and pugnacious White House director of communications. "There is no better forum to advance the ideas you believe in and to give them elevation and to have them stated with the kind of clarity you believe." If Buchanan decides to run for president after he leaves the White House this year, he will not be a typical candidate. Candidates usually attempt to mince their words rather than their opponents. They seek out consensus rather than contention. And when they do aim to discredit and divide, they try to conceal their own intentions. Not Buchanan. He looks and acts like a cross between John Belushi and Roberto Duran.

Buchanan may also represent a new kind of national politics that has hitherto flourished only on New Right letterheads and in camp meetings of the far right: not simply nationalist, but enamored of the military and of America's imperialist past; not merely anti-Communist, but allied with the international right from Botha to Pinochet; contemptuous of black leaders, whether in the United States or South Africa; openly hostile to black demands to redress historic grievances; jealous of the attention accorded to Jewish memories of the Holocaust; possessed of a moral-political vision of its own that it places above law and Congress; and, above all, in search of a strong leader—a new Theodore Roosevelt—who can realize that vision.

Buchanan first found himself in the center of national controversy in 1970, when as a Nixon administration speechwriter he wrote Vice President Spiro Agnew's vociferous attacks against the moderate Republicans and the media—the "little group of men who . . . enjoy a right of instant rebuttal to every presidential address." During Watergate he was President Richard Nixon's most outspoken defender. In September 1973 Buchanan temporarily derailed the Senate Watergate hearings by putting the onus for Nixon's ills on Congress and the press. Indeed, the day after Buchanan appeared before the committee the networks canceled their daily coverage.

As a syndicated columnist from 1975 to 1984, Buchanan was the point man for white supremacist Rhodesia and South Africa. He helped lead the opposition to the Panama Canal treaty and to the establishment of a national holiday for Martin Luther King. He went to bat for suspected Nazi war criminal John Demjanjuk. Since he became the Reagan administration director of communications in February 1985, he has waged a lonely but often extremely visible struggle within the White House for the right's foreign policy agenda.

Last month Buchanan reached new heights of notoriety when he stepped forward to defend Lt. Col. Oliver North,

John B. Judis, a senior editor of *In These Times*, is completing a biography of William F. Buckley Jr., *The Consummate Conservative* (Simon and Schuster).

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the man many conservatives inside and outside the White House blame for the president's plight. Buchanan had worked with North on the campaign to win support for *contra* aid, and he delighted in North's peculiar combination of defiant individualism and unbridled anti-communism. But on orders of chief of staff Don Regan, Buchanan kept his peace when Reagan fired North.

Then on Thursday, December 4, Regan demanded a "communications plan" from Buchanan to counter the growing scandal. Buchanan responded in his own inimitable manner. He drafted an op-ed piece ("I smoked through two drafts," he said later) and then carried it over to the *Washington Post*. Buchanan knew that Regan would never approve his incendiary attack against ungrateful Republicans and the liberal press and Congress, but Buchanan put what he believed to be his loyalty to Reagan and the conservative cause above his loyalty to the White House hierarchy. Regan called Buchanan on the carpet on the day the column was published, but there was nothing the chief of staff could do to discipline him.

In his *Post* column on the scandal and in subsequent television appearances, Buchanan has tried to transform a question of the highest law—that which binds a president to the Constitution—into a conflict between "legal technicalities" and a higher moral calling. He draws an analogy between North's attempt to divert funds to the *contras*—a coalition still dominated by former Somocistas—and the Founding Fathers' decision to defy the British Crown. "Ollie North is a hero," Buchanan wrote, "a man who saw further than others and took risks to his own career, because he knew that in helping a peasant army in Nicaragua, he was buying time for his own distracted and indifferent countrymen."

IN MOST American intellectuals, the darker passions of class, race, nation, and ethnic group are sublimated during the passage to adulthood. Some Jews have a little bit of Kahane in them, just as some blacks have a bit of Farrakhan. Buchanan retains more than a little Louise Day Hicks and Joe McCarthy in him. One of the most cultured men in politics—the possessor of a fine literary style and a wide knowledge of history and literature—Buchanan puts metaphor and allusion at the service not only of an elemental loyalty to family, but of a simmering ethnic resentment and a fanatic anti-communism.

Buchanan, born in 1938, was raised in Northwest Washington. He was the third son in an Irish Catholic family of nine. His father was an accountant who began to do well after World War II when he became a partner in a large Washington firm. William B. Buchanan instilled a strong sense of family loyalty in his children. But the other side of loyalty was a feeling of "us versus them" that prevailed among the Buchanans. The children, especially the three oldest sons, maintained a united front against the outside world. When any of them was threatened, all were supposed to come to his defense. Angela "Bay" Buchanan, Pat's younger sister and former treasurer of the United States, said, "There was a support system where if one got in trouble the others were supposed to support them automatically."

Henry Buchanan, an accountant in suburban Washington, thinks his younger brother transferred this sense of loyalty to the two men he worked for—Nixon and Reagan. "When we were very young, and we were with a group that went into another neighborhood, Pat was the type of guy who would stick there, even if the other guys outnumbered us, and we didn't know what would come of it, whereas some of the guys might head for the woods." At dinner the Buchanans argued politics. William Buchanan had two great heroes—Gen. Douglas MacArthur, whom Truman had fired for insubordination during the Korean War and who became the symbol for a defiant conservatism that believed victory was possible in the cold war, and the arch anti-Communist Joe McCarthy.

According to Henry Buchanan, the children came to understand from the Catholic Church that communism was not merely alien, but "diabolical." "In 1917," he explained, "Mary, the Blessed Mother, appeared to three children in a blessed place called Fatima two months before the Bolshevik Revolution, and she said that one day Russia was going to start conquering other nations, devouring nations, and will keep spreading unless it is stopped."

PAT BUCHANAN stood out from his brothers and sisters not only because of his intellectual ability (he could talk before he could walk, and while still in his crib could complete the rosary that his father was trying to get his older brothers to memorize), but also because of his feistiness. "Pat was notorious for challenging others with ideas that they might not agree with," Angela Buchanan said.

Buchanan's belligerence got him into trouble when he was 20 and a senior at Georgetown University. He was driving home with a date on a Saturday night in October when he passed two policemen in a patrol truck. They pulled him over for speeding. Buchanan denied it, and when they altered the charge to passing in an intersection, he told them what he thought of them. A fight broke out. Buchanan broke his hand, and the two cops had to be treated for injuries. Buchanan was arrested, and eventually pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor. "I was ahead on points," Buchanan recalls, "until they brought out the sticks."

Buchanan was expelled from Georgetown. Through his father's intercession, Georgetown agreed to take him back the next fall if he stayed off campus and out of trouble for the next 11 months. Buchanan worked in his father's office that year and read. That summer he discovered William F. Buckley Jr. and the *National Review*: "Here were guys who were saying things that I believed in with wit and style." Buchanan was particularly influenced by *National Review* foreign policy columnist James Burnham and by Burnham's book *The Suicide of the West*. Burnham conceived of the cold war as the battle for the survival of Western civilization. And he saw the only hope of the "West"—which he identified with Northern European Christendom—in the destruction of Soviet power and the establishment of world empire dominated by America. Burn-

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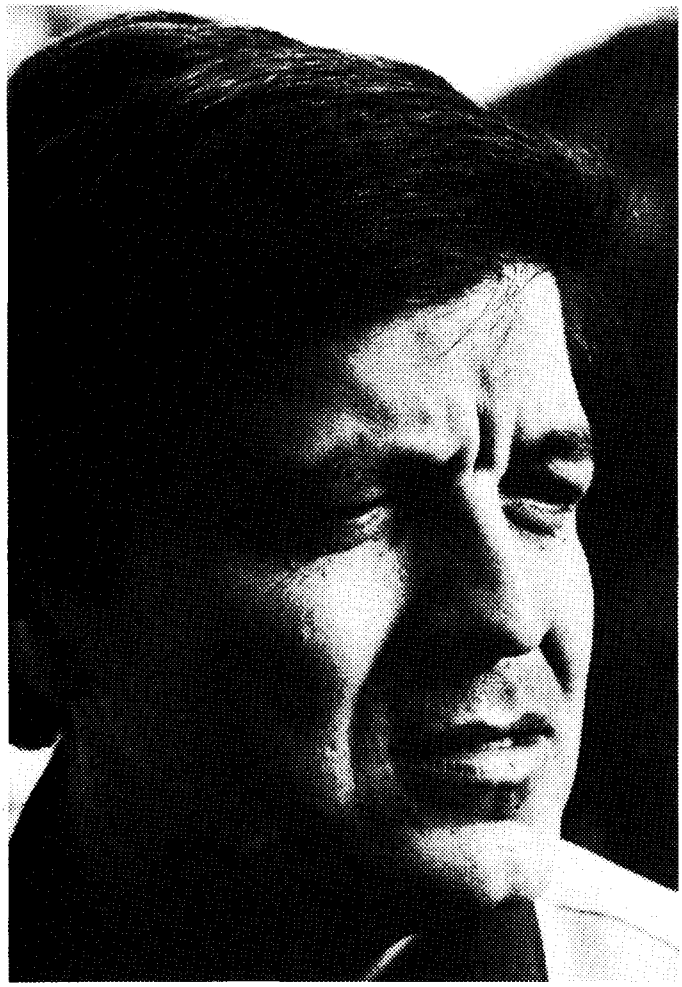

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ham accorded particular importance to the preservation of Western colonial influence in Africa and of white rule in South Africa. Echoing Burnham, Buchanan would later declare, "When we apologize for colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism, we're spitting on our own history."

After graduating from the Columbia School of Journalism, Buchanan got a job as an editorial writer on the conservative St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*. In December 1965, at a cocktail party in Belleville, Illinois, Buchanan got a chance to meet Nixon, whose grasp of foreign policy he admired. He told Nixon that if he were planning to run for president in 1968, he wanted to work with him. Nixon invited Buchanan to New York and quizzed him in a three-hour interview.

Buchanan shared what William Safire called Nixon's "dark side," the tendency to see himself as an embattled outsider who had to defeat an implacable enemy. Buchanan became one of the principal proponents of Nixon's politics of "us versus them." When Nixon read Buchanan's November 1969 speech attacking the media, he commented excitedly, "This really flicks the scab off, doesn't it?"

BUCHANAN ENDOWED politics with the imagery of God and Devil and the violence of adolescent gang warfare. In 1969 he urged Nixon not to visit Coretta Scott King on the first anniversary of her husband's assassination because it would "outrage many, many people who believe Dr. King was a fraud and a demagogue and perhaps worse. . . . Others consider him the Devil Incarnate." During the 1972 campaign, when Senator Edward Muskie was Nixon's principal opponent, Buchanan advised in memoranda poking a "sharp stick into the cave to bring Muskie howling forth," and going "down to the kennels and turn[ing] all the dogs loose on Ecology Ed."

During Watergate Buchanan helped formulate the Nixon administration's political strategy. In a July 1973 memorandum to Nixon, Buchanan urged him to change the issue "from a question of whether the President 'knew' of the cover-up . . . to a question of whom do you wish to govern this nation—the President or the men who would destroy him. Our adversaries do not simply wish to show Nixon's involvement, they wish to castrate the President, to strangle the New Majority in its crib, to reverse the democratic verdict at the polls in November. . . . If we have to drift into demagoguery, so be it—we owe them a few."

There is no evidence that Buchanan holds a personal animus against blacks, Jews, Hispanics, or women—or any other group outside of liberals, Communists, and the editors of the *Washington Post*. Women who have worked for him, such as speechwriter Mona Charen, contrast his attitude toward women favorably with Don Regan's. But from the Nixon years on, Buchanan's political views reflect a hardened insensitivity toward the historic concerns of both blacks and Jews.

Along with Kevin Phillips, Buchanan helped formulate for Nixon what came to be called the "new majority" or "Southern" strategy. This strategy rested on splitting off Southern and Northern ethnic Democrats dissatisfied with liberal racial and social policies and uniting them with traditional Republicans. Urging Nixon in one memorandum to use the "race issue" to divide Democrats, Buchanan framed the Southern strategy with an explicitness that bordered on racism. Writing on affirmative action in his 1975 book, *Conservative Votes, Liberal Victories*, Buchanan called on Republicans to "discriminate in favor of the Democratic minorities we can win." He urged Republicans to coalesce with the Wallace wing of the Democratic Party. As a columnist, he opposed the attempt to deny tax exemption to the segregationist Bob Jones University. And in a column opposing making King's birthday a national holiday, he described him as a "divisive and polarizing figure."

As a columnist, Buchanan came to the defense of a retired Cleveland auto mechanic, John Demjanjuk, who on the evidence accumulated by the Reagan Justice Department and the Israeli government was ordered extradited to Israel in 1983 to stand charges for having murdered thousands at Treblinka during World War II. Although Buchanan's choice of a crusade offended Jews, his defense of Demjanjuk as a victim of mistaken identity is not completely implausible. But Buchanan also called for the abolition of the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, which was set up in 1979 to assist in tracking Nazi war criminals. Buchanan derided the work of the special office as "running down and deporting—before their maker can get to them—65- and 75-year-old Central European immigrants who permitted or perpetrated atrocities in a war that ended some 40 years ago."

Buchanan has suggested that the preoccupation with the Holocaust is a diversion from the present-day evil of communism. He objected, for example, to the U.S. government's apology for shielding Klaus Barbie from French justice. "To what end," he wrote, "all this wallowing in the atrocities of a dead regime when there is scarcely a peep of protest over . . . the concentration camps operating now in China and Siberia, in Cuba and South Vietnam."

Buchanan's attitude would make more sense if some of the same people preoccupied with the Holocaust were not also among the most militant anti-Communists. His stands on the Holocaust and affirmative action appear to reflect lingering ethnic resentments. Buchanan seems merely to be asking in more sophisticated form the old question that one American ethnic group so frequently asks of another, "Why do *they* deserve special treatment?"

AFTER NIXON resigned, Buchanan remained in office in the hope that he could be nominated ambassador to South Africa. He had never been to South Africa, but he had come to believe—partly, it seems, under Burnham's influence—that the preservation of the white regime there was critical to the future of Western civilization. When Ford, fearing Senate outcry, refused to nominate him, Buchanan resigned in October 1974.

Buchanan's role in the Reagan administration has been far different from the role he had in the Nixon administration. When he went to work for Nixon, he was an unknown editorial writer from St. Louis. When Don Regan

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hired Buchanan as director of communications, he was a successful columnist and television personality making upward of $400,000 a year and living in a three-story house in McLean down the road from Edward Kennedy. Regan hired Buchanan to appease conservatives like Paul Weyrich and Joe Coors who wanted someone important they could trust in the White House. Thus Buchanan came in with his own constituency behind him and with an independent national reputation.

He also had his own political agenda, one that he believed was congruent with the president's but that he would press regardless of the official administration line. Its centerpiece, as he had himself explained in a December 1985 *National Review* article, was the overthrow of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Where Buchanan had shied away from public dissent during the Nixon years, he has not hesitated to express publicly—even in print—his disagreements with administration policy and with other administration officials under Reagan. He has made of his office an independent political outpost that has led to two years of bitter clashes in the Reagan White House.

In his first month on the job, Buchanan quarreled with both Regan and aide Michael Deaver over whether the president should take his case for *contra* aid to the public and resist any compromise with Congress. In March 1985, without clearance from Regan, Buchanan published an op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* in which he charged that "with the vote on *contra* aid, the Democratic Party will reveal whether it stands with Ronald Reagan and the resistance—or Daniel Ortega and the communists."

Throughout his two years, Buchanan has clashed with the State Department and other White House aides over U.S. policy toward South Africa. Buchanan wanted Reagan to veto any sanctions bill, and he opposed any administration overtures to the African National Congress. Last fall the argument came to a head over whether the president should veto outright the Senate's sanctions bill or combine the veto message with a proposal for limited sanctions. Buchanan won the battle over the message, but three days later the president announced the State Department's plan for limited sanctions.

PART OF what was at stake in these quarrels was political strategy. "I strongly believe in the politics of conflict, that you go into battle with your opposition," Buchanan says. "You reach the position where you're both stalemated, you get a truce line, and you accept the compromise, but then you use the truce line to begin the next advance, and you keep at it."

But Buchanan also endows the struggle of the *contras* and the white South Africans with a particular religious and geopolitical significance that escapes other administration officials. He sees the *contras* pitted against "diabolical" Communists. And he sees the South Africans as carrying the torch of Western civilization. "I've always viewed South Africa as an outpost of Western empire and Western civilization," Buchanan says. "I think that by and large it is an extraordinarily beneficial influence in the history of mankind. When it reaches its great extensions—take the Panama Canal, take Hong Kong, take French Indochina, take South Africa—when you are out on the frontiers of empire, all the amenities and the ideas that can exist at the center in London and Washington, you cannot have an identical situation out there."

As White House communications director, Buchanan has extensive administrative responsibilities over speechwriting and public liaison. His staff like him. According to Peggy Noonan, he combines "a public pugnacity and a private sweetness." But Buchanan has been lax at administration and at preserving turf and status for himself and his employees. He has been like an absent-minded professor trying to teach philosophy in a reform school.

Regan's aides—dubbed "the mice"—have undercut Buchanan's status and authority within the White House. Buchanan was moved out of a spacious office in the West Wing and given a smaller, windowless one. For his birthday last November, his friends gave him a window frame, which he has mounted on one of his office walls.

Buchanan suffered his most serious setback last month. He had wanted to succeed David Abshire as the ambassador to NATO. "I liked the idea of arguing foreign policy over European television," he said. But the State Department, still smarting from Buchanan's opposition to its South Africa policy, vetoed his appointment. Buchanan, who had planned to leave the White House after two years, must now remain on the job until the scandal clears.

BUCHANAN HAS displayed the same kind of filial loyalty to Reagan that he did toward Nixon. When Buchanan defended Reagan against Republican turncoats and liberal detractors, his imagery was revealing:

> When a mob shows up in the yard, howling that the head of the household be produced, the sons do not force the Old Man to sit down at a table and write up a list of his "mistakes." You start firing from the upper floors.

As in Watergate, he is trying to make the scandal a contest between Republicans and Democrats over foreign policy. "Make no mistake," he told a Cuban-American audience in Miami on December 8. "The furor in Washington is [not about] whether technicalities of the law were circumvented, but whether or not communism will be stopped before it has established a permanent base of operations in Central America."

Buchanan's outspoken defense of Reagan and North has spurred his friends and allies who have been urging Buchanan to run for president in 1988. For the last year, Howard Phillips, chair of the Conservative Caucus, and Tom Ellis, president of Jesse Helms's Congressional Club, have been trumpeting the virtues of a Buchanan campaign and presidency. Both men have been highly critical of Reagan, and believe that Buchanan could succeed where they believe that Reagan has failed. "Reagan is well-intended, but he has allowed himself to be guided and directed by people not of his philosophy," Ellis says. "I think Pat Buchanan has the intellectual capacity and background not to let that happen in an administration. I think with Pat the Republi-

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can Party will have the kind of Churchillian figure for all seasons that we haven't had in my lifetime."

But both Buchanan's offensive and the talk of his running for president have prompted a mixed reaction even among staunch conservatives. Some, such as Representative Jack Kemp, have applauded Buchanan for speaking out, but just as many have their doubts about whether Buchanan's outbursts will benefit the president and conservatives. Kevin Phillips thinks Buchanan's strategy is undermined by the Iran arms connection. "It is very tough for the administration to counterattack because people don't like dealing with Iran. It counters the idea of a patriotic comeback. You can talk about Ollie North, you can talk about the *contras*, but you come back to the Iranian problem." Phillips chuckles at the possibility of Buchanan running. "I don't take that seriously, and I don't think Pat does either," he says.

But Buchanan, who has a portrait of his hero Theodore Roosevelt next to his desk in McLean, has begun to listen to Howard Phillips's and Tom Ellis's urgings. Buchanan believes that none of the current presidential candidates can provide the Republican Party and conservative movement with the strong leadership it needs. "There is a real vacuum in the leadership. When the president leaves, the conservative movement for the first time in decades is leaderless. The party is leaderless. No one has yet moved into the vacuum."

But could Buchanan fill it? His fledgling candidacy represents the growing fragmentation of the post-Reagan Republicans. Amid the rubble of supply-side tax cuts and the rabble of former Nicaraguan National Guardsmen they are searching for a program and a theme that can capture the voters' imagination in 1988. If Buchanan becomes the leader of the Republican Party, it will not be the near-majority party that Reagan led over the past six years; it will be similar to the discontented rump that adopted Barry Goldwater in 1960. The mix of aggressive nationalism and "discrimination" in favor of white ethnics pursued by a strong leader indifferent to "technicalities of the law" represents an extreme alternative unpalatable to many conservatives as well as liberals. Buchanan's politics resembles the "center extremism" that Kevin Phillips, in his book *Post-Conservative America*, called an American version of fascism.

Such a politics might have resonated within the kind of revanchist and polarized political climate created by the 1980 Iranian hostage drama and by a decade of unsuccessful busing programs, but in 1988, when most Americans display about the same interest in the *contras* as they do in professional soccer, it represents a form of political nostalgia. Buchanan's politics could still have a future, but they don't have much of a present.

Still, Buchanan insists that he can fill the leadership vacuum in the Republican Party. "The only reason to do something like this is because you do say and believe things that are different from everybody else that is out there. Everybody." But what does Buchanan say that is different from everybody else? "If I run, you'll hear," he says—and grins.

Oliver's apologists and the American idea.

DEMOCRACY AND COLONEL NORTH

BY LEON WIESELTIER

To live outside the law you must be honest.

—Bob Dylan

WELCOME BACK *le mal américain*. Make room for the revival of "democratic overload." The breakdown of the Reagan administration over its clandestine commerce with Iran and the *contras* has fanned back into life the ancient anxiety that there is a contradiction between democracy and foreign policy. A mood of elegant pessimism is overwhelming Washington. Of course the policy toward Iran was wrong, of course those who broke the law should be punished—but still a higher extenuation is sought. With a fine Tocquevillian feeling, it is wondered whether the closed conduct of foreign policy is possible in an open society; whether the prestige of law in American society, or the participation of Congress in foreign affairs, or the Constitution itself, is responsible for the failures of American diplomacy; whether democracy suffers a permanent disadvantage against its enemies, whose very opposition to freedom, in a cruel irony of history, enables them to act freely in the pursuit of their interests. Oliver North is treated like a test that the American political system is failing to pass.

Item. In an essay written for *Partisan Review*, Washington foreign policy consultant Michael Ledeen complained that "foreign policy is so deeply enmeshed in our domestic stresses and strains that it is hard to determine where the 'domestic' ends and the 'foreign' begins." Ledeen attacked what he called "a pernicious pseudo-democratic theory according to which everyone is entitled to have a say in

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policy." The "would-be policy-makers" he assailed are Congress ("one cannot possibly conduct foreign policy with more than 500 secretaries of state"), the media ("in many ways the media have taken over the prerogatives of a secret intelligence agency"), and "the lawyers and the judges." Ledeen proposed a new elitism in foreign policy, citing Michel Crozier: "If society will no longer tolerate elites and political institutions do not provide the necessary safeguards for long-term planning . . . then democracy falls apart." The members of this elite should be "experts, not generalists," and "those few persons seeking to advance the national interests of the United States." (Presumably Ledeen counts himself in their number.)

When Michael Ledeen's involvement in the Iranian intrigue became known, *Partisan Review* wisely "postponed" his article. A pity, because the article is an excellent introduction to the mentality that delivered this debacle. Ledeen was loftily complaining of a lack of covert operations in the name of geopolitical visions even as he was a cog in one. And Ledeen's reliance upon Crozier provides a direct link between the Iranian intrigue and the neoconservative distrust of democracy. In the mid-1970s two works—Crozier's *The Trouble with America* and *The Crisis of Democracy*, a report for the Trilateral Commission with contributions by Crozier and Samuel Huntington—introduced the notions of "democratic overload" and "democratic distemper." Huntington, for example, took issue with Al Smith's famous dictum that "the only cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy." He argued instead that "some of the problems of governance in the United States today stem from an excess of democracy. . . . The effective operation of a democratic system usually requires some measure of apathy and non-involvement on the part of some individuals and groups."

IT WAS ONLY a short distance from distrust of democracy to defeatism about democracy. That distance was traveled by the other authority of Ledeen's essay, the ultimate neoconservative crepe-hanger, Jean-François Revel, who wrote: "Democracy may, after all, turn out to have been a historical accident, a brief parenthesis that is closing before our eyes." *How Democracies Perish* (1983) was written to demonstrate that democracy "is not basically structured to defend itself against outside enemies seeking its annihilation." Thus did one of democracy's great defenders became one of democracy's great detractors.

Item. On the *New York Times* op-ed page December 23, Representative Jack Kemp correctly remarked that the pessimism of "Jean François Ravel" [sic] doesn't sit well with the optimism of Ronald Reagan. Still, Kemp wrote to sound a tocsin: "Many of the president's congressional opponents will attempt to use Iran as a means to lessen his power. . . . Mr. Reagan must draw the line, and, if necessary, veto any reduction in his authority to conduct foreign policy." That same day Norman Podhoretz appeared in the *Washington Post* with "The Imperial Congress," which indicted Congress for "aggrandizing itself at the expense of the president," and more generally for treading illegitimately upon the foreign policy of the United States. Reading Kemp and Podhoretz, you would have thought that Congress had just sold arms to the mullahs of Iran, traded weapons for hostages, smuggled illegal funds to the *contras*.

Item. In these pages, my colleague Charles Krauthammer observed recently ("Divided Superpower," TNR, December 22, 1986) that "the presidency finds itself in the permanent bind: to fulfill its obligations as leader of a superpower or to fulfill its obligations as leader of a democracy. Confronted with the choice, a president must choose the latter. But it is the choice itself—not the identity of the president or his management style—that is the source of our recurring crisis." And in *Time*, he wrote: "Americans may not like being a superpower, but they have no choice, there being no one else to carry the burden. So they have to face the responsibilities of power. And one of them is the necessity of secrecy."

Item. George Kennan, for a half century a tireless critic of the intrusion of democracy into diplomacy, wrote recently in the *New York Review of Books* urging a constitutional amendment to create "some sort of an advisory body . . . made up of persons remote from participation in partisan political activity . . . to look deeply into present trends and possible remedies and to tell both the legislative and executive branches of government of the things they *must* do, whether they like it or not, to head off some of the worst eventualities that seem now to be, almost unhindered, in the making." Such a body would find "a better use of the 'elder statesmen' who are to be found in such abundance in our society but whose experience, as things now stand, goes largely wasted." Call it government by Council of Foreign Relations. (Kennan's view was updated for the present crisis by Walter Isaacson, co-author of *The Wise Men*, a dense and worshipful account of Kennan and his colleagues in the postwar foreign policy establishment. In the *New York Times* in December, Isaacson suggested "the appointment of a panel of 'wise men,' an outside group of elder statesmen to give regular foreign policy advice to a foundering president.")

A CONVENTIONAL wisdom is aborning: the proposition that there is a kind of zero-sum relationship between moral integrity and political efficiency, that the perfection of American democracy results in the imperfection of American foreign policy. Or, to put it differently, that the perfection of American foreign policy may require the imperfection of American democracy. The adherents of this view cannot face the thought that the debacles in Iceland, in Iran, in Nicaragua, were simply poor policies, founded upon terrible judgment and clumsy action—that they tell more about a specific strain in American political culture than about American political culture itself, more about this president than about the presidency. Instead, like the man who concluded that God was dead because he had lost his faith, they conclude that the form of American government is flawed because it has failed to satisfy their desires.

The tension between the needs of a great power and the needs of a free society is a familiar feature of American

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history. The architects of the American system were reluctant to deprive the executive branch of the power to pursue American interests freely. In 1781, for example, the Department of Foreign Affairs (later the Department of State) was created, over the objections of radicals in Congress, precisely to diminish the disorderly influence of Congress upon American diplomacy. Robert R. Livingston, the first secretary of foreign affairs, counted among his achievements the establishment of his right to correspond with American representatives abroad without notifying Congress, expressly for the purpose of protecting the confidentiality of such communications. A decade later, during the controversy over Washington's Neutrality Proclamation, Alexander Hamilton became "Pacificus" to argue for the independence of the president in foreign affairs. The president, not the Congress, was "the organ of intercourse between the Nation and foreign Nations."

It was Tocqueville, naturally, who intuited the American tension most lucidly. In a famous passage of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville declared:

> I have no hesitation in saying that in the control of society's foreign affairs democratic governments do appear decidedly inferior to others. . . . Foreign policy does not require any of the good qualities peculiar to democracy but does demand the cultivation of almost all those which it lacks. . . . [A] democracy finds it difficult to coordinate the details of a great undertaking and to fix on some plan and carry it through with determination in spite of obstacles. It has little capacity for combining measures in secret and waiting patiently for the result. . . . But these are just the qualities which, in the long run, make a nation, and a man too, prevail.

Tocqueville concluded with a peroration in praise of aristocracy. A democracy tends "to obey its feelings rather than its calculations." An aristocracy, on the other hand, "does not easily yield to the intoxication of thoughtless passions. An aristocratic body is a firm and enlightened man who never dies." Thus it was that "almost all the nations that have exercised a powerful influence on the world's destiny . . . were controlled by an aristocracy."

LET US call them neo-Tocquevillians, these reformers of democracy in the name of foreign policy who wish to adjust the system slightly to accommodate wild and wonderful intrigues. There are two matters that these neo-Tocquevillians must address, however, before they start tinkering with the time-honored methods of American statecraft. First, they must demonstrate that democracy's judgment about matters such as selling arms to Iran was inferior to the judgment of those who wanted to overlook democracy. Second, they must demonstrate more generally that the position of the United States in the world has been weakened by the vigorous exercise of American freedoms, particularly by the freedom of the press.

But all this, of course, they cannot demonstrate. Consider, for example, the question of secrecy. The neo-Tocques have decided that the United States may not survive as a great power without secrecy of the sort that would have protected Oliver North. North is the case that tells: if he falls, secrecy in government falls. But the CIA conducts many clandestine activities that are not in the style of Oliver North. They are successfully kept secret, and they are legal. (Of course, a war is rather hard to hide; but then a war is not an operation.) Judging from the "Casey accords," the protocols of confidentiality that William Casey and the Senate Intelligence Committee arrived at in 1984, the agency has not exactly chafed under congressional oversight. Oliver North's adventure, in short, caused a crisis precisely because it was *not* typical of clandestine American action. Those who wish to make it typical will simply make all clandestinity seem lawless, all concealment seem wrong. People are arguing against covert operations à la Oliver North; almost nobody is arguing against covert operations themselves. As usual, however, the Reaganites refuse to take yes for an answer. They will not let Frank Church rest in peace.

And secrecy from whom? In the case of Oliver North, it was not merely the American people, or the press, or the Congress, that was kept in the dark. It was . . . the government. North broke creative new ground in official deception. Hiding behind the recovered prestige of covert operations, he told *nobody*. Not (it appears) the president, not the secretary of state, not the secretary of defense. Empowered to engage some of the most strategically significant states in the world, inebriated by a feeling of direct access to the godhead, North free-lanced. Are North's kinds of covert operations really needed to keep the barbarians at bay?

THERE WAS A period of American history when privateers were acceptable agents of American policy. The very sentence of the Constitution that grants Congress the power to declare war also grants it the power to grant "letters of marque," which were licenses granted to individuals by the government to make reprisals, generally at sea, against the forces of the enemy. (Naval consultants, we might call them today.) But it is precisely because America became a great power that the institution of the marque was finally revoked. The foreign policy of a great power cannot be represented by adventurers.

Some of the neo-Tocques seem not quite offended by North's offenses because they approve of the policies he was advancing, especially aid to the *contras*. But there were other scams and stratagems that North might have pursued. Imagine, for example, that Oliver North, who was awarded a presidential medal for his help in providing AWACS to Saudi Arabia, concludes, as well he might, that the Arab-Israeli conflict is the most serious flash point in the Middle East after Iran; that it will not be resolved without the participation of Jordan; that Jordan's participation will require an American "gesture of goodwill"; that such a gesture must take the form of American arms. And so North orders missiles from the Pentagon. Naturally this must remain secret, because of the opposition of Congress.

Do I see some neo-Tocques squirming? Do they mutter that maybe American law cannot make itself scarce every time somebody in the Situation Room has a plan? After all, there is no country in the world whose interests in Wash-

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ington are based more upon congressional activism in foreign policy than Israel. "The imperial Congress" is never more imperial than about the Middle East. Is Michael Ledeen offended by the influence of interest groups and "domestic political warriors" on behalf of Israel? Is Norman Podhoretz put out by Congress "aggrandizing itself at the expense of the president" when it blocks arms sales to Jordan?

It is not the open society's hobbling of foreign policy that worries the neo-Tocques. It is the open society's hobbling of a foreign policy that they support. Their argument, like Oliver North's, is with the political system of the United States. That is a system in which the thrilling sensation of rightness, the absolute conviction of certainty, counts for nothing against the decision of a majority. There is always a vote. Before the vote, zeal may convince. After the vote, zeal may corrupt. Of course the proudly procedural character of the American system has its special frustrations. But it offers protection against precisely that thrilling sensation of rightness, which over the centuries has caused more crimes and more abuses of power than parliamentarianism.

When the principle of congressional activism in foreign policy was renewed during the Vietnam War, and congressional oversight of intelligence was established in the wake of Watergate, the legislative branch harbored an intensely adversarial feeling toward the executive branch. And Congress may have trammeled the presidency too much. For example, it is hard to see how a successful policy against terrorism can be pursued with a law against assassination on the books. In the 1980s, however, the executive branch returned the compliment of the 1970s. Put simply, the White House detests the Congress. ("A tribe of pygmies up there on Capitol Hill," Patrick Buchanan called it a few weeks ago.) The Reagan administration perceives Congress only as an obstacle to be overcome, a mechanism to be manipulated. Oliver North deposited Iranian money in *contra* accounts *after* Congress had appropriated $100 million in military aid. Congress simply did not matter.

MIGHT NOT THE administration have been saved from its worst embarrassment if it had consulted with Congress? Picture the response of the Senate Intelligence Committee upon being informed, behind closed doors, that the National Security Council was about to ship arms to Iran. The senators who were not speechless would almost certainly have done their best to bring the White House to its senses, to challenge the freebooters at the NSC to defend their proposal against all the skepticism it warranted. Would it have been partisan politics, or isolationist insecurity, to have tried to dissuade McFarlane and North from their trip to Tehran?

The neo-Tocques (or at least the *contra* supporters among them) want to change the rules in the middle of the game, because they are losing it. They refuse to face the fact that for six years, in a period of rising enthusiasm for America rampant, Ronald Reagan tried and failed to convince the country of the justness of the *contra* cause. There was nothing historically inevitable about the Boland amendment. Yes, there are isolationists in Congress. There will always be isolationism in America, for all the reasons that historians offer. There were isolationists in Congress, too, when Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy moved American foreign policy decisively toward diplomatic and military interventions. But it is hard to imagine Truman and Kennedy, often cited as inspirations by the current president, whining about the system, spinning little paranoid stories about the spectacular strength of political opponents, and so on.

In the end, Ronald Reagan failed to provide what the *contras* and the conservatives needed most: leadership. The democratic requirement that the president seek the approval of the people for his policies does not mean that the leader must be a follower. But in foreign policy, as in domestic policy, this president has proved to be the happy prisoner of the pollsters and the political consultants, who are the real shackles upon the political system of the United States.

CERTAINLY THE most repugnant of the extenuations of the government is the attack on the press. The administration is turning upon one of its own most cherished tools. No president since Kennedy has been treated so tenderly by the media as Reagan. More to the point, the White House has made fine and calculated use of the reporters swarming all around it. How dare an administration that has been planting stories for years wax righteous against leaks? The leak has been a primary instrument of Reagan policy. But, once again, when the system fails to please the Reaganite, the Reaganite scorns the system.

The neo-Tocques call for a modification of the American democratic tradition. Its instructions and inhibitions, they believe, must be challenged. But they have already been challenged—by Oliver North. To be sure, the colonel did not develop a theory for modifying the American way. He merely modified it. Now Rambo, now Gomer Pyle, he insulted the principle of law that constitutes the distinction between democracy and the lesser forms of public life. Also, more than any other American, North doomed the *contras*. North's patriotism is plain, but it is hard to get too choked up about a man who would give his life for a country he cannot understand.

There may be a tension between being a great power and being a democracy. But there cannot be a contradiction. Such a contradiction would signify nothing less than the failure of the American experiment. The United States is a great power, and it shall remain a great power; but it shall never be a great power like Philip II's Spain or Frederick II's Prussia or Napoleon's France. It is the American idea, the American innovation, to be a great power with a difference, a great power with compunctions—a democratic great power. That is not easy; but it is not impossible. As a friend of mine who works for a liberal Democratic politician sagely remarked: What is the point of assassinating somebody in the name of totalitarianism? A loss of faith in the United States would be a high price to pay for Ronald Reagan's mistakes. □

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Altered States

Two new pictures remind us yet again that the film medium can be either cordial or cruel to pieces that have been successful in the theater.

Little Shop of Horrors comes off well. It was originally a film, in 1962, with the young Jack Nicholson. I've never seen that film, but I seem to be the only person in the country who hasn't: the talking plant's "Feed me" was a high-sign between friends of mine for years before the musical arrived.

Little Shop of Horrors
(Warner Bros.)
Brighton Beach Memoirs
(Universal)

The off-Broadway musical, which opened in 1982 (still running), is a pleasant joke, with cardboard characters and unobjectionable songs. The grisly humor I'd heard about in the film is replaced by just enough trouble so that things can come out soothingly right. A timid young florist's assistant, working in a failing shop in a slum neighborhood, has two passions: a strange plant he's nurturing and his co-worker, a gum-chewing, dyed blonde who is enamored of a brute. This cartoon Petrouchka tale ends happily as the speaking plant grows immense, turns out to be carnivorous, makes the youth successful in money and love, and finally is destroyed. Or so people think.

The show begins and finishes when it's supposed to; it's more emollient than exciting. The new film is no more exciting but, because of added means of articulation, is much more entertaining.

I'm a pushover for vaudeville-in-life—as in *The Ruling Class*. *Little Shop* begins with a pan shot of a hyperrealistic decrepit neighborhood, with derelicts lying about. Then as the camera comes to an alley, out prance three brightly dressed young black women singing to the camera. These three, Michelle Weeks, Tichina Arnold, and Tisha Campbell, funny and lively, weave through the picture, always in garish costumes that have nothing to do with anything, sometimes singing on a fire escape in the background, sometimes shuffling past the camera, making a joke of the proceedings in a tickling, jivey way.

Rick Moranis, as the wide-eyed simpleton; Ellen Greene, as the paint-pot princess of his heart; Vincent Gardenia, as the fretful owner of the shop, all do their caricaturing well enough. Steve Martin, as Greene's boyfriend—a sadistic dentist—does his frenetic best to shuck his amateurish self-consciousness, and nearly succeeds. The songs by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman leak past, inoffensively.

But there are three better elements. First, the man-eating plant, which grows and writhes and smiles and mouths words as it could not do on stage. It's the creation of Lyle Conway, aided by platoons of "plant performers" and given orotund voice by Levi Stubbs of the Four Tops. Second, the editing of John Jympson, which pings the film along with diamond-cutter strokes. Third, and overall, the direction of Frank Oz, one of the Muppet group and therefore a talented and lucky man. Oz it is who keeps *Little Shop* on its toes so that, although the people and the story and the score are only stopgaps, the film is welcome because it doesn't take anything too seriously, not even the jokes. And Oz keeps flicking in little Muppet touches: for instance, when an ensemble number is sung in the street, an occasional line is filled in from a window and the last line comes from a drunk on a doorstep.

Brighton Beach Memoirs was the first of Neil Simon's double-B autobiographical plays. The second, *Biloxi Blues*, will soon follow the first to the screen. The third, *Broadway Bound*, is now bound on Broadway. I haven't seen the last, but the first two, for all their laughs and heart tugs, were for me among the worst of Simon. Most of his plays are contraptions, made out of whole or less whole cloth. This trio has a different aim. His previous autobiographical play, *Chapter Two*, took a painful experience of middle life and padded it with theatrical falsities. His youth and early manhood plays are more subtly corrupted. They aren't padded with stock stuff; they are apparently honest treatments of material that is important to the author. But Simon doesn't know how to be honest any longer. He can't quit being intrusively clever even when cleverness is not really his aim. Possibly the 15-year-old Simon was a master of the one-liner, though it seems odd that only the audience, not his family, notices it. More likely, the playwright Simon, wanting to treat his youth comically—and why shouldn't he?—knows only one way to do it: gags.

The theater, the very shape of the theater, helped the play. The proscenium contained the retrospective piece like a picture frame; the compactness of place made the play seem to have a texture. The story, insofar as it is one, is about a Jewish adolescent's sexual and other torments in his family's home in Brooklyn. Time: the late 1930s, toward the end of the Depression and the beginning of World War II. The household also includes a mother who makes Deborah look indecisive, a harassed father with

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Marlene. Though she's seen only in film clips from the past, Dietrich is throatily present on the sound track, commenting, vocally shrugging. Maximilian Schell's documentary is a small gem. (Reviewed 12/8/86)

Platoon. Written and directed by Oliver Stone, who was there, this film about Vietnam combat is gritty, pungent, strong. A few soft spots; but mostly it's a gripping reminder. (1/19/87)

Sid and Nancy. You may care little about punk rock; still, the lives and deaths of Sid Vicious and his girlfriend will very likely grip you in this well-acted, well-made chronicle. (10/27/86)

Thérèse. Alain Cavalier's quiet biography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is beautiful. In every way. A work of art. (12/29/86)

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touches of Job, an older brother with his own torments, a widowed aunt resigned to nullity, and the aunt's two daughters, one asthmatic and the other pneumatic. Add all the ingredients to chicken soup and stir.

Film magnifies the material, brings it so close that we can see the stitching between the skits. The film's photography paradoxically takes Simon's photos out of the album and makes them less affecting. Another extrinsic factor hurts the play in transfer. On stage we were all aware that this was *Neil Simon*'s autobiography and we were meant to be especially appreciative that a hugely successful Broadway figure was disclosing his past. On film this is just one more screenplay. Worse, it's just one more account of adolescent agony, this time jostled by the author's latter-day craftiness. I don't doubt the facts of the film (how could I?): I question the author's use of them, topped by the use of Hitler refugees as a sort of happy ending. The arrival of relatives from Europe will bind up the family's wounds and reconcile them to poverty in the bliss of reunion and sharing.

All this was less blatant in the play, which was directed by Gene Saks—who then directed the film. Saks seems to have spent most of his energy here on making Jonathan Silverman a facsimile of Matthew Broderick, the originator of the adolescent role. Fadeaway inflections, hobbled gestures, Silverman retreads all the Broderick equipment to do a passable imitation.

The film's only interest is in the casting of the aunt and the mother. Judith Ivey, previously seen on screen as a sexpot, does a fair job (*a*) sounding Jewish and (*b*) embodying the shy, somewhat dumpy aunt who finally finds herself. Blythe Danner plays the mother. Danner has been a glory among American actors ever since her appearances in Molière's *The Miser* (1969) and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1972) at Lincoln Center—too little seen on both stage and screen, still a glory. It was brave of her to take on the Jewish mother here: as actors say, it's a stretch. Danner doesn't quite make it. Her swanlike loveliness fights the supposed grubbiness of her life, and although her quick ear has given her the right "music" for the role, the performance is an actor's production, not a full woman.

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN ON MUSIC

Sic Transit 'Goya'

A talented young artist, shy but ambitious, the sixth of ten children, grows up in a small Italian village where one year his crippled leg is said to have healed miraculously—sometime after his nurse had taken him to a shrine. At the age of 16, he comes to America; by the time he is 35 he has become a great critical and popular success, unique among his peers.

But soon there are problems. He is plagued by doubts. He finishes his works late and in great haste; little acclaim is offered as recompense. So he becomes an impresario, using his organizational and social skills to create festivals that win him the gratitude of whole cities for rescuing them from fiscal oblivion. He is welcomed in the courts and drawing rooms of the noble and wealthy. Finally, late in life, despite being honored with riches and fame, he sits with his entourage in an enormous castle and broods about himself, his failures, his one-time success, and the nature of his art. "Hell begins," he says to himself, "on the day when God grants us a clear vision of all that we might have achieved, of all the gifts which we have wasted, of all that we might have done which we did not do."

There might be opportunities in this plot for a composer and librettist, particularly if a romantic love interest were intertwined with the art. The dramatic tale of success and failure might also offer a chance to meditate on the demands of art and compromises of life. Was the failure of this artist real or imagined? Was his acclaim earned or simply granted? Was he spoiled by success, or was success a sign of his being spoiled? It's the sort of story Gian Carlo Menotti might suitably have undertaken to set to music: he habitually writes his libretti as well as the scores, he is often in search of an appropriate subject—and it is, after all, his own life. That same mysterious but unverified healing lies in his past (and forms the basis of his opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*), that same early success, that same warm embrace of and by society, and that same brooding in recent years on what he has called his "hellish life."

Instead, at the urging of the tenor Placido Domingo, he wrote *Goya*—a fictionalized operatic version of an artist's life that also begins in gladness and ends in despair. Its $1.1 million production at the Washington Opera was one of the social events of the Washington fall season, the premiere boasting the attendance of Queen Sofia of Spain, Armand Hammer, Princess Irene of Greece, the Marquess and Marchioness of Valdeolmos, Baron Thyssen-Borne Misza, the Duke and Duchess of Feria, the Marchioness of Artazona, and various other hangers-on, with Menotti the center of a swirl of attention. Few national publications were without their *Goya* features, and the same comments were made by the principals in interview after interview; a Goya exhibition was mounted at the National Gallery; and the opera was broadcast nationally on PBS. Unfortunately, the critical reception was nearly as uniformly negative as the hype and celebration were positive. And like life imitating art imitating life, the aesthetic failure combined with the social success probably only increased the sort of brooding that led to the opera in the first place. "Some of the things that tormented him," Menotti said about his hero Goya, "are tormenting me."

The key to those torments—indeed, the only evidence for such torments in *Goya* at all—is in the last scene of the opera, where this fictionalized version of the painter—now deaf and almost blind—is the judge of his own life in a fantastical Walpurgisnacht full of Goyaesque scenes, satanic dancing, and heightened agonizing. The accusations made by the painter against himself: that Goya did nothing to stop the injustice he saw in Spain; that he was cowardly, ambitious, vain, venal, opportunistic, shameless; that he sacrificed virtue and pride for the sake of his art. The translation: that Goya was content merely with abstract beauty and did nothing to "feed the poor" or help the oppressed.

But within the opera itself, we see none of this. In fact, the rest of the opera is essentially a love story in which the woman, the Duchess of Alba, is wooed, pursued, and lost amid much narrow use

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of painterly metaphor ("Let my brush caress you") and Pucciniesque arias that risk Broadway sweetness. The only pictures of society are a satiric portrait of the queen—the duchess's rival—and a grand party at which Goya begins to go deaf. There is no dramatic hint of injustice, cowardice, politics, or shame, or sacrifice in the name of art, in any of this; and the issue of what has been called "social consciousness" is raised only at the end of the opera, and in a rather banal way. Yet what the final scene suggests, and what the interviews tell us again and again, is that this is the opera Menotti wanted—an opera about great issues, about the conflict between being a good man and being a good artist. His yearning for dramatic grandeur and high seriousness—or at least acceptable facsimiles of the same—is attenuated in the final scene to an almost embarrassing extent. The artist is earnestly sentimentalized: "O Art, O Beauty.... My only truth, my only Love," is one of Goya's final cries. Between that yearning and the broad-stroked love story of the rest of the opera there is as large an abyss as between *Moses und Aron* and *Oklahoma*.

That abyss runs through Menotti's career—and, by still further extension, through much of 20th-century opera. Menotti yearns to be profound. What he can really do, when he applies himself, is be musically theatrical. (That is no mean feat.) He wants to be more than successful, but he finds success itself something of an albatross. "You cannot do both," he has said. "You cannot be a charming man and also a wonderful artist. You've got to be cruel with your life so that you can become a great artist.... That is one thing that I wish I could do because I love to be charming. That's why I will never be a great artist." That, at least, is his explanation.

CONSIDER MENOTTI'S career. He enjoyed a stunning early success, beginning with *The Medium* in 1946, a tragic opera that played 211 performances on Broadway and, under the sponsorship of the State Department, toured Europe in 1955. He went on to write *The Consul* (1950), which won a Pulitzer Prize, was translated into 12 languages, and was performed in over 20 countries. *Amahl and the Night Visitors* made its debut in 1951 on NBC television and became a staple of the Christmas season. And if he had done nothing more after the Pulitzer-winning *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (1954), Menotti would have been hailed as one of the most successful composers of "serious" opera the United States has ever seen, a musician who alone among his colleagues found a way to bring together contemporary opera and the ordinary listener. His melodic gifts, his taste for melodrama, his acute theatrical sense, and his accomplished style all gave the word "Menottian" an indispensable utility.

But then came the operas that can be considered, in Broadway parlance, to have closed on opening night: *Maria Golovin* (1958), *The Last Savage* (1963), *Help, Help, the Globolinks!* (1968), *The Most Important Man* (1971). The decline seemed to coincide with Menotti's promotional and impresarial ventures, beginning with the founding of a music festival in the otherwise sleepy Italian village of Spoleto in 1958. In 1977 came an American counterpart in Charleston, South Carolina, a site suggested by the National Endowment for the Arts because of the city's economic problems. Now another "Spoleto festival," as they have been called, is being added in Melbourne, Australia, as well. These efforts, along with Menotti's reputation from his early works, secured him fame, a considerable fortune, and a Kennedy Center Honor in 1984.

BUT WHAT is the nature of the difference between the early career and the late? I haven't seen enough of the late works to know—possibly no one ever shall again, except for the regulars at the Spoleto festivals. But in some of the early works there is the conviction that faith has a healing power—as in *Amahl* and *Bleecker Street*. The result is overdrawn and treacly, but it is touching. *The Medium*, on the other hand, is remarkable for the opposite reason; it verges on the sentimental grotesque. Its hothouse plot concerns a medium who is a hoax and a con artist, until at a séance she is touched by a supernatural force in which she cannot believe. Menotti called it a "play of ideas" about a woman "caught between two worlds"; her life is based on convincing others to believe in things she cannot believe herself. And *The Consul* is a sort of overwrought Kafka tale set to music, a self-consciously bleak portrait of totalitarian life in which any faith would be out of place. In these "serious" works of the early years (which went along with quirky comedic dramas) there is a mood that is derived from high modernism: a sense of homelessness, uncertainty, and faithlessness in a world adrift—against which there occasionally comes the insistence that faith is possible. The seriousness flirts riskily with kitsch; the aesthetic ambition becomes nearly coy with charm.

In at least some of Menotti's later works, the balance shifts: the "play of ideas" becomes a play of clichés. Even faith is invoked because it works dramatically. In *The Last Savage*, for example, Kitty Scattergood, the bitchy daughter of a Chicago millionaire, finds a living specimen of prehistoric man on one of her journeys through the bush. She cages him, takes him back to Chicago, brandishes a whip, civilizes him, and dresses him in velvet. At a garish party, she introduces him to the worlds of finance and the arts. The savage sings: "All these faces are so frightening and inhuman. They want to teach me civilization. What is the price I have to pay?" He is then consumed by a King-Konglike rage—"I want no part of you." While *The Consul* limits its bleak vision to a particular unnamed country, and *The Medium* limits it to a con artist's parlor, in *The Last Savage* all civilization—and all art—is scorned in favor of some mythic state of nature. There is a sort of nihilistic ease at work that makes the lyricism of the music seem as phony as the plot.

IN *Goya* there is an attempt to return from kitsch, and from easy late-Romantic nihilism. The con artist becomes artist, the savage becomes painter. Goya is a crude peasant who is "tamed" by a woman—the duchess—and inducted into high society. But he cannot join the world revealed to him, nor fully link it with the world of art. Art is, in fact, his refuge. But Menotti uses the word "art" in the same way the society he professes to scorn does. He genuflects before it. He writes as if the simple mention of art will magically turn his own opera into art as well.

Menotti, of course, is not alone. Opera, like the Medium in Menotti's work, is "caught between two worlds"—between the world of popular success (which involves not a little condescension and con artistry) and the world of portentous "art" (which can be just as much of a con but can also involve unexpected brushes with something that really does seem supernatural). Also like the Medium, opera today may be equally alien to both worlds. The drama is not found in either world, but in the parties

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and commemorations, in the festivals and in the features. It is no wonder that Menotti's music is as overwrought as it is conservative. He strains at high modernist Sturm und Drang, settles for overly sweet melody; but in neither case is he a true believer. While *Goya* is a dramatic hodgepodge, a talented exercise without discipline or energy, part of Goya's final cry does seem genuine: "Pity the artist's humanity," he sings, praying for salvation. It could be the cry of the age.

The myth of the Communist professors.

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

BY THEODORE DRAPER

I.

A POST-NEW LEFT professoriat has arisen out of the ashes of the New Left student movement of the 1960s. It is a strange phenomenon in the midst of the Reaganite conservatism of the 1980s. Faced with a choice of career after the rigor mortis of the New Left, many of its former activists and sympathizers chose to get advanced degrees and ascend the academic ladder to professorships in the universities. By now a good many have gained tenure and many more are on their way. The New Left is dead, and yet it is very much alive in the very places where it was born.

An insider's view of how all this came to pass was given some time ago by Ellen W. Schrecker, who now teaches American history at Princeton University. In a now defunct post-New Left academic journal, *Humanities in Society* (Spring/Summer 1983), she reported the presence of "the largest and most important cohort of left-wing scholars in American history." They were so numerous that "in certain fields, American history for example, Marxism is the mainstream." They were said to "constitute the intellectual legacy of the New Left, the political activists of the 1960s who turned to scholarship in the 1970s in order to make sense of their own experience." She explained that "the temptation to trade the frustrations of politics for the pleasure of scholarship is strong, all the more so when the professional rewards for such a switch are all too obvious."

In reality, it was not so simple a trade. The professional rewards have not been without some political compensations. They have taken the peculiar form of a minor academic industry devoted to the history of the American Communist Party. Books and dissertations have proliferated on this subject in recent years, after a long interval of virtual neglect. Instead of making sense of their own experience by confronting it directly, these post-New Left professors seem to want to make sense of it through the medium of an earlier generation. They have evidently turned back to the 1930s, '40s, and '50s because they are unwilling or unable to face up to their own political history. They have made the substitution as if it enabled them to feel that they are still keeping the faith by some mysterious process of political transference.

The latest example of this genre is the recent book *No Ivory Tower*, by the same Ellen W. Schrecker. It has received thoughtful reviews from Nathan Glazer and C. Vann Woodward, but they were mainly concerned with her treatment of the academic side of the story, summed up in her subtitle, *McCarthyism and the Universities*. This side is not my concern, for one reason because I am not competent to deal with it. I am interested, rather, in the other side of the story, which concerns the Communist professors caught up in the inquisitorial frenzy. I knew a good many of those Schrecker mentions by name, and I have no unpleasant memories of any of them. My concern is not with them as individuals, but with the mythical way they are portrayed as a group.

The nub of the matter is the singular political symbiosis that has taken place between the present generation of post-New Left academics and their Communist predecessors. This aspect of the book raises larger issues about the way the history of American Communism is now being presented by post-New Left historians. Even if we can believe everything Schrecker says about what went on in the universities in every unflattering detail, we need not believe everything she says about the Communist professors in every flattering detail.

II.

SCHRECKER'S professorial Communists often emerge in her pages as self-righteous, high-minded political innocents. They were, she assures us, "perfectly loyal, though politically unpopular, American citizens." They refused "to use their classrooms for purposes of indoctrination." They were committed to "objectivity and fairness." They followed the Party line, because the Party happened to follow them. "While they were in it," Schrecker writes, "they did, it is true, follow the Party line; but they did so in large part because it was heading in the same direction they were. They did not let the Party interfere with their academic work and, in fact, consciously strove to keep their political activities separate from their scholarly ones." She implies that it was a sign of naïveté to ask a member of the Party whether he would "be loyal in a war between America and the U.S.S.R.," the implication being that he would, of course, in all circumstances, be loyal to America. One Cornell professor is approvingly cited: "We were intellectuals. We were scholars"—as if there were nothing more to it.

Much of this would have surprised and offended the Communist professors at the time. If there was anything they did *not* believe in, it was classless "objectivity and fairness." The merest Communist novice knew, or thought he knew, that these terms were products of bourgeois illusions and deceptions. Yet Schrecker wants the reader to believe that there was no intellectual difference between Communist professors and all the others. She gives assurances that the former "shared their colleagues' commitment to the standards of their calling, in particular its concern with objectivity and fairness." If so, those professors were remarkably ignorant of the most elementary Communist doctrines, or were remarkably successful in convincing Schrecker that they were not really

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Communist intellectuals and scholars. The Communists I knew in the universities would have been ashamed to admit that they thought the same way as everyone else, and that they did not know the class character of such bourgeois shibboleths as "objectivity and fairness."

TO BE fair to Schrecker, however, it cannot be said that she always represents the Communists as if they were political simpletons. She is sometimes saved from oversimplification by her own inconsistencies and contradictions. A case in point is her treatment of Communist indoctrination. The Communist professors, she says, "were almost unanimous in refusing to use their classrooms for purposes of indoctrination." She cites statements to that effect from three former professors, including Howard Selsam, a philosophy teacher at Brooklyn College, in whose class I sat in the early 1930s. At first Schrecker suggests that Communist professors, for reasons of professionalism and prudence, separated "their politics from their teaching." But on the very next page she writes:

> Even though Communist professors generally refrained from outright proselytizing in class, this does not mean that their political beliefs did not influence their academic work. Naturally, scientists—and probably close to half of the academic Communists were scientists—had no problem keeping their politics separate from their scholarship. People in other fields, however, sometimes taught their courses from what they considered to be a Marxist perspective. Some, like the Brooklyn philosopher Howard Selsam, even taught Marxism. Taught, not indoctrinated. The distinction is important, for whatever the intellectual quality of the Marxism these teachers purveyed, they all struggled to present it in an unbiased way. Many went out of their way to let their students know that they were Marxists, if not Communists.

This passage is a good example of how Schrecker labors to make her Communists too good to be true and then backs away. She has just assured the reader that there was not political indoctrination or proselytization. But now it turns out that there was no "outright" proselytization. Professors in non-scientific fields even taught courses from a "Marxist perspective" or, as in one case, taught Marxism. Another Communist philosopher "who did discuss more controversial matters in class, always warned his students he was a Marxist"—as if that immunized them from his political influence. We are sternly instructed to see the distinction between teaching and indoctrinating, as if it were clear in practice. In any case, we are assured, Communists "struggled" to present their Marxism "in an unbiased way."

Was there really such a Chinese wall between their Marxism and their communism that they could teach one without intimating the other? Have Communists never camouflaged themselves as "Marxists" and "socialists," on the unstated assumption that theirs is the only authentic Marxism and socialism? These questions seem never to have occurred to Schrecker, or, if they did, she has suppressed them in the interest of shielding her Communist subjects from the least suspicion of bias. If the Communists were without bias in the turbulent years of the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, it must be that there was no bias anywhere in the academy at that time—a state of academic grace rarely achieved.

Whether or not Communist professors proselytized students, they certainly proselytized other professors. When I was a student at Brooklyn College in the early 1930s, there was not a single Communist professor in the school. By the end of the decade there must have been at least 25. The largest Communist unit at the College of the City of New York, or CCNY, according to Schrecker, numbered about 40. They did not grow by a process of spontaneous political combustion. Sympathizers were carefully spotted and cultivated. Open meetings were held to which likely candidates for membership were invited. "Shop papers" on local school matters and more general political issues were put out by Party units. These papers were not models of "objectivity and fairness." Schrecker, always tolerant of Communist "shenanigans" (her word), reports that "they were somewhat lacking in gentility as well as embarrassingly uncritical about the Soviet Union, but they were, nonetheless, the authentic voice of a politically significant segment of the academic community"—as if their Communist authenticity made up for their lack of gentility and embarrassingly uncritical defense of the Soviet Union. Elsewhere we learn that they were so lacking in gentility that some of the papers engaged in "scurrilous attacks on individuals" and that some of their editors later admitted that the attacks were "often irresponsible and in bad taste." Still, Schrecker was given the impression that the shop papers were "fun to read," despite the scurrility, irresponsibility, bad taste, and Party-line hackwork with which they were filled. The fun was certainly not shared by those on the receiving end.

III.

THE EMBARRASSINGLY uncritical support of the Soviet Union was not a strange aberration on the part of these papers. The role of the Soviet Union was central in the Communist consciousness; the Soviet Union was then the embodiment of what communism stood for, the guarantor of the true faith. This does not mean that every American Communist knew a great deal about Soviet Russia, or that what he thought he knew had much relation to reality. It was enough to believe that the "defense of the Soviet Union" was the first and foremost task of every Communist. The one sure way to get into trouble in every Communist Party in that era was to criticize anything that came out of the Soviet Union. Some deviations might be forgiven; that one, never.

Just how deeply the Soviet Union was imbedded in the American Communist consciousness partially depended on when one entered the Party. During the first 15 years, before the Popular Front, the Soviets were the Party's main political asset. One did not merely belong to a national Party; one belonged to an international movement of which the Soviet Union was the single success and guiding star. Without the support and prestige of the Soviet Union and the international movement, many a national Party, including the American, would have had very little vitality. The great crises that arose in the American and other Communist Parties were invariably set off by a change of line on the part of the Soviet Union. The workaday life of individual American Communists may have been spent coping with problems in factories, schools, and elsewhere, but the consciousness of being a Communist was inseparable from the political and psychological rapport with the Soviet Union.

One eminent mathematician protested to Schrecker that Party discipline was "scarcely shared with respect to matters of private thought by a very considerable number of people who have attached themselves to the group." How considerable they were may be a matter of dispute. But this apologia unwittingly reveals that the most indiscipline per-

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mitted was to keep non-conformist thoughts to oneself. Even so, it was not easy to keep a double bookkeeping system going for any length of time, one private, one public. Few remained in the Party for long who had to suppress their disagreements for a considerable period. Schrecker herself was convinced that "certainly they had reservations about some aspects of the Party line, but they supported most of it most of the time." Even those reservations were generally confined to "matters of private thought" in order to stay out of trouble with the Party's true believers. Only a cretin could have wandered into the American Communist Party and stayed in it for any length of time without knowing that fealty to the Soviet Union and its leader was unconditional and obligatory.

The Communist professors were no more immune to this and other imperatives of Communist good behavior than lesser mortals in the Party. The professors were not, as some of them may belatedly like to think of themselves, disembodied free spirits. In real life, Communist professors, like most professors, had limited areas of professional knowledge. Their Communist selves were for the most part outside their professional spheres and were largely political, in which area they generally knew as much or as little as most others. They deferred just as much as most others to the superior political wisdom and authority of the "cadre," the party's "functionaries" or full-time leadership.

MOST Communist professors were no more likely to question major political decisions handed down from above than anyone else. Communist discipline was the same for professors as for all others. A sudden, unexpected change of line might confuse or trouble professors, but they soon found ways, like the rest, to adjust to it, or to get out. Few got out, until the 1950s. The notion that professors, because they were professors, behaved very differently in their political lives from other Communists is a myth. This is not to say that all Communist professors were the same, any more than all the others were the same; but there remained a political common denominator of ideology, faith, discipline, and loyalty that made up the core of what it meant to be a Communist, professor or proletarian.

Despite the myth of professional purity in Schrecker's book, inconsistencies and contradictions again appear unresolved. In only one short passage does she tell the reader what kind of Party these professors joined. The revelation happens to come in reference to the Popular Front of 1936-39:

> This new line, it must be noted, created serious contradictions within the CP. For, despite its apparent moderation, the Party still retained *its central commitment to Stalin's Russia* and attacked Trotskyists and other critics of the Soviet regime with all its old sectarian fervor. In addition, it retained its traditional *authoritarian structure* and expected its new recruits to follow its albeit less revolutionary line with the same unquestioning devotion older Communists did. [Italics mine.]

For once, some reality breaks through. But it is immediately followed by this:

> It is hard to tell whether the academics who embraced the CP during the Popular Front period would have done so had its line been more intransigent. Few of them were revolutionaries, nor were they even particularly interested in the Soviet Union. They joined the Party, almost all of them, because they thought it was the best way to fight fascism.

I am willing to believe that some—but not almost all of them—joined the Party during the Popular Front without quite knowing what they were getting into. In fact, that was true of a good many before

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the Popular Front. But in August 1939, these same non-revolutionaries who were not particularly interested in the Soviet Union were faced with a sudden change of line. The Soviet Union had shatteringly made a non-aggression pact with the chief fascist state. The American Communist Party was no longer the best way to fight fascism; it was the best way to fight the embattled enemies of fascism.

WHAT DID these professors do? Did they leave the Party in droves because it had betrayed what had originally drawn them into it? In fact, as Schrecker notes, very few left; the numbers could almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. The Nazi-Soviet pact could not have failed to make the Communist professors keenly interested in the Soviet Union. It was at the center of the crisis of conscience that beset many Communists in that period. If the professors were immune, they must have been intellectual nincompoops. Whatever makes people join a Communist Party, they do not remain the same once they have been in it for long. By 1939, the political education even of these professors must have progressed far enough for them to learn that the "central commitment" of their Party was to Stalin's Russia, and that they were bound intellectually to an "authoritarian structure." The new recruits were not so different from the old-timers after all.

Yet this is how Schrecker explains the change of line in 1939: "In the aftermath of the Pact, the Party, which had abandoned the anti-war movement in favor of collective security in 1935, returned to the cause of peace." Less than two years later, when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the "cause of peace" was apparently abandoned in favor of the cause of war. Was it really the "cause of peace" that was embraced by the Communist professors from 1939 to 1941 and then the cause of war from 1941 to 1945? To describe Communist policy in the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact as the "cause of peace" without any qualification is to parrot the Party line of that period. The cause was obviously that of the Soviet Union whether it required a propaganda of "peace" or of "war."

Schrecker relates that a former Communist remembered his

> acutely embarrassing experience of telling people that the Soviet Union was justified in invading Finland in 1940, that the war between France and England on the one hand, and Germany on the other was an "imperialist war," and that it didn't matter who won.

That man was telling the truth; those things were what the Communist professors were saying. But it accords ill with the idea that they merely thought that communism was "the best way to fight fascism" or that the Party had embraced the "cause of peace." After so many years, a historian might be expected to distinguish between propaganda and substance.

How, then, can we be certain that the Communist professors were "perfectly loyal, though politically unpopular, American citizens"? Politically, they were American citizens who were "perfectly loyal" to the Soviet Union. Whether they would have betrayed their political loyalty and fought against the Soviet Union in a war with America is an open question. They were never called on to make such a decision. Some might have gone one way, some another. The only thing we can be sure of is that it is impossible to be sure how all of them would have reacted. If perfect loyalty is understood politically, however, it is absurd to make the categorical statement that they were perfectly loyal to America rather than to the Soviet Union.

IV.

I HAVE GONE into this aspect of Schrecker's book at some length because elsewhere she repeatedly resorts to ridicule to downplay the connection between American Communism and the Soviet Union or international communism. At the very outset, she calls attention to the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, the Berlin blockade that same year, and the "fall" of China to the Communists. Her dismissive comment is: "To give the American Communist Party any credit for these revolutionary changes was ridiculous." It is also ridiculous to think that anyone in his right mind ever did give them such credit. Something else was, however, not ridiculous—that the American Communist Party automatically and enthusiastically supported these changes, and that everyone in it was called on to do likewise (except perhaps in "private thought"), whether or not they were professors.

At another point, Schrecker discusses the obligation of the academic Communists to work in "front groups," to which she adds that the extent to which they were "dominated by the CP is unclear." The "fronts" were so called for good reason; Party policy openly dictated that they should be dominated—or led, as the Party more delicately put it—by Communists. This was abundantly clear to everyone at the time. But her next comment is: "But most of the Communist academics who joined such groups probably did so because they were concerned about the issue that the organization claimed to address, not because Stalin told them to." This gratuitous reference to Stalin is not as ridiculous as Schrecker thinks it is.

Stalin certainly did not personally tell the American professors to belong to Communist fronts. But the theory of the "fronts" or auxiliaries was first put forward by Lenin in a seminal work, *What Is to Be Done?*, as far back as 1902. Lenin had called them "transmission belts" to the Party. The international practice was then worked out in the Communist International in the early 1920s. When Stalin took control of the Comintern in 1928-29, the system was further developed, undoubtedly with his approval even if he also had other things on his mind. The American professors may not have belonged to fronts because Stalin told them to. But they belonged because the Party told them to.

Schrecker also sees fit to ridicule Arthur O. Lovejoy, a founder of the American Association of University Professors. Lovejoy had said:

> A member of the Communist Party is . . . engaged in a movement which has already extinguished academic freedom in many countries and would—if it were successful here—result in the abolition of such freedom in American universities. No one, therefore, who desires to maintain academic freedom in America can consistently favor that movement or give indirect assistance to it by accepting as fit members of the faculties of universities, persons who have voluntarily adhered to an organization one of whose aims is to abolish academic freedom.

Schrecker's sardonic comment is: "In other words, because there is no academic freedom in Russia, American Communists had no right to enjoy it here."

Whether they had such a "right" was a legal question. Whether they were right to espouse the cause of a Party with a "central commitment to Stalin's Russia," where academic freedom had long been stifled, was a political question. American professors who demanded a "right" for themselves that they were willing to see denied to professors in other parts of

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the world were hardly in a position to preach to others about academic freedom. They themselves did not believe in such an absolute right—for fascists, for example. American Communists may have had a "right" to enjoy academic freedom here, whether or not there was academic freedom in Russia. But a curious light is shed on their devotion to the ideal of academic freedom if they could belong to a Party that zealously supported kindred Parties that, on coming to power, had stamped out academic freedom. It does not seem to occur to the post-New Left historian that there is something intolerably one-sided about Communists who demand academic freedom in liberal societies and deny it to liberals in Communist societies.

How much illiberalism should a liberal society tolerate or defend? It is a most perplexing question. But Schrecker does not ask it. Instead she takes the easy way out and for the most part treats her Communists as if they were liberals.

V.

ONE OF Schrecker's prime exhibits is a mathematician at the University of Michigan who spent six months in jail in 1959 for defying the House Un-American Activities Committee. He deliberately chose to use the First Amendment after others found that they could safely refuse to testify by taking the Fifth. He appears to have been a person of unusual courage and conviction. Nevertheless, his case makes one wonder whether he could have been the kind of Communist that Schrecker says he was.

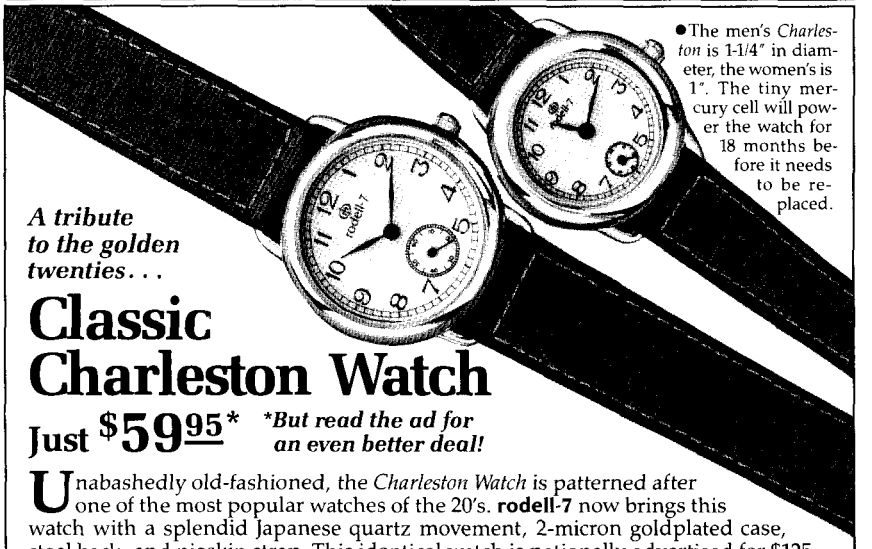
I knew his father slightly. He was a professor of economics who joined the Party back in 1931, in the most sectarian and rigidly extremist period in the Party's history. Ten years later, we are told, he was "something of a fixture at anti-war rallies around Boston during the Nazi-Soviet pact period, because he 'was looked on as someone who would present the Communist Party's point of view.' " He is said to have left the Party in the late 1940s "but was still an avowed Marxist," whatever that means. In effect, he had been a faithful, disciplined Party member for about two decades. I remember him as a sometime contributor to the *New Masses* when I was an editor in the late 1930s.

I offer this background only because his son, the mathematician, was, as Schrecker puts it, "a 'red diaper baby,' " that is, one brought up from childhood in a devout Communist family environment. He joined the Communist Party while a student at Harvard in the 1940s, and remained in the Party after having been hired by the University of Michigan in 1950. His ordeal began with his refusal to testify in 1954. "Though no longer officially a Communist at the time of his hearing," we learn, "he had never really broken with the Party, and he remained active on its fringes through his years in Ann Arbor."

Why did he refuse to testify? Because he was "the quintessential anti-authoritarian personality. Principled, tenacious, and fiercely independent, he had an almost innate predisposition for political dissent." He believed uncompromisingly in the principle of "the absolute inviolability of freedom of speech."

What are we to make of this rationale? After ten or more years in the Communist Party, during the expulsion of Earl Browder because he was no longer acceptable to Moscow, and a return of the Party line to the worse excesses of the past, this "quintessential anti-authoritarian personality" did not dissent from what Schrecker herself describes as the Party's "traditional authoritarian structure." He could not have been so naive or ignorant that he did not know of the Party's "central commitment to Stalin's Russia." How in the world did he express his "anti-authoritarian personality," his principled independence, and his "almost innate predisposition for political dissent" in a Party with an "authoritarian structure"? Did he believe that one thing was right for Stalin's Russia and another for Truman's and Eisenhower's America?

The problem is not with him; it is with the historian who studies him. Hundreds of thousands of people have gone through the Communist movement, believing, as this man must have believed at one time, that it was the world's salvation. Many have regretted it or at best looked back on it as a useful political education. The first stone can certainly not be thrown by me. But anyone with a quintessentially anti-authoritarian personality and an absolute devotion to freedom of speech strains credulity to the breaking point if he also stays in the Communist Party for about ten years, during its most extremist, post-Browder phase, and after leaving it remains—for reasons we never learn—active on its fringes. Something is missing here.



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Why indeed did all the Communist professors refuse to testify? The answer tells us something about their relationship with the Communist Party. Conceivably, some might have defied the committees in other ways. After all, the revolutionary tradition called for a different kind of behavior. It used to be expected of revolutionaries—and Communists still thought of themselves as working toward a revolutionary change in society—that they would stand up and speak out boldly for their cause. Some were so openly engaged in Party activity that they might have had little to lose by taking this course. But why was it so different in every one of these cases? Whether they should have been required to testify is a different question; I am here concerned with what the reason for their identical behavior tells us about them.

Every once in a while, as I have noted, Schrecker lets a breath of fresh air into her pages. At one point she comes out with the real reason for the solid front they presented to the various committees and investigations:

> The Party was, after all, a disciplined organization; the teachers who were involved apparently felt that they had to present a united front. Even people like the former CCNY instructor who claimed, "I didn't like the performance of the defense," nonetheless "did what everyone else did even though I wasn't part of any deliberative process." In retrospect, what seems most distressing about the behavior of these teachers was not their lying—which, given the no-win situation in which they felt themselves, may well have seemed to offer the only hope for keeping their jobs—but their willingness to let a small group of Party leaders make a decision that was to affect their own careers and livelihoods.

The comment does Schrecker credit; it reveals that she knew all the time that the Party, and not the professors, decided how they were going to behave. As usual, the policy was handed down from on high and was meekly followed by those below, despite the fact that these people were academics, scholars, and intellectuals. One academic active in Urbana, Illinois, even told Schrecker, who dutifully records it, that she could "never remember any situation in which we were told what to do, what to think, given a line and told to carry it out." She must have been a rare phenomenon; or, more likely, a victim of selective amnesia, an affliction frequently encountered in these pages.

Schrecker notes of her approximately 70 informants who left the Party that they chose afterward to be "neither Communists nor anti-Communists" and had "few regrets about their affiliation with the Party." We are told that many had simply left by the 1960s without "any specific disagreement with the Party but simply that they could no longer spare the time." Schrecker herself expresses scorn for "the flawed, but common, assumption that it was not possible for someone to be an ex-Communist without becoming an anti-Communist."

The point is worth considering. These professors prided themselves on their intellectuality. They probably read the Party press with more than ordinary care and frequency. Except for local matters, on which disagreement could go on for hours until the decision was made, they could have had no illusions about what would get them into trouble if they seriously disagreed with the line on major national and international issues. Party members with "an almost innate predisposition for political dissent" did not last long in this movement. Yet most of Schrecker's professors had stayed in the Party for years, through one or more somersaults of the Party line.

WERE THEY such somnambulists that they could go in, stay in, and get out of the Party without reflecting on an experience that must have been one of the most meaningful in their lives? If they did reflect on it, could they have simply faded away without feeling some obligation, if to no one but themselves, to think about why it was they had left? Schrecker writes as if they deserve a badge of honor for having few regrets. She seems to be particularly eager to absolve them from the supreme shame of anti-communism. Her attitude appears to be that communism was a venial sin, for which one need have no regrets; but anti-communism is a mortal sin, which cannot be forgiven.

But communism was not something that one embraced for trivial reasons. It was also not something that one was likely to reject for trivial reasons. That so many of these professors are supposed to have left the Party as if it had been a social club trivializes their entire experience. Perhaps the whole experience is too painful for them to talk about. Perhaps some of them wished to avoid thinking that they had done anything wrong and so to continue to live happily ever after. But that is no reason for a historian to fail to look beneath the surface of these patently implausible and at best escapist rationalizations. Still, there is method in this mindlessness: it serves to make the Communist professors seem as innocent politically in going out of the Party as they had been in getting into and staying in it.

This post-New Left historian writes as if Communists were fallen angels and anti-communists were the devil's own disciples. These two terms raise something of a problem. Communism is codified in its canonical literature; it is at any one time what the authoritarian Party says it is. In effect, one knows where one stands with orthodox communism, especially in the period treated in this book.

Anti-communism has no such distinct, determinable definition. It may be passive or active; it extends from the extreme right to the extreme left; it may be fascist, reactionary, conservative, liberal, social-democratic, Trotskyist, anarchist, and more. It is merely a negation of communism without a positive content of its own—except to Communists, who prefer to lump all varieties of anti-communism together.

Thus there was no single anti-communism that the Communist professors had to turn to; they had plenty of political options to choose among. They could even have remained Marxists—but not the kind of Marxism that the Communists have misappropriated. Yet, as Schrecker notes, most of the Communist professors left the Party formally only to remain within its orbit, or without really changing their minds. Few of them, she says, can cite a specific incident that disillusioned them, and most left the Party painlessly. If so, this tells us something about the influence that communism must still have had on them.

If Schrecker is right and most of these ex-Communist ex-professors still regard their Communist pasts without regrets and without self-examination, that is just about the saddest thing she could say about them. One wonders how many would really want the kind of absolution she gives them.

VI.

WHAT IS BEHIND this mythification of the Communist professors?

Schrecker herself is clearly no throwback to the old-time Communists. From time to time she drops remarks that no Communist loyal to the Party would make, even though she promptly goes on

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as if these comments mattered little. In her generation of leftists, in any case, it was not fashionable to be the type of Old Leftist that the Communists represented. Something else explains this new academic-political phenomenon.

The tie between these two quite different generations is based on an assumed fellowship of the "left." It is an ambivalent kinship. The post-New Left is both attracted to and unhappy with the Old Left, as represented by the Communists. Schrecker shares this post-New Left ambivalence; she accepts the Communists as an authentic part of the "left" while establishing a certain distance from them. The kinship with them is shown by her practice of using the terms "Communist," "left-wing," and "radical" interchangeably. On a single page, she applies all three terms indiscriminately to a Tulane professor who was admittedly a Communist. The implication is that all leftists, including Communists, belong in one political family and have more in common than not. By neither entirely approving of the Communists nor rejecting them the post-New Leftists shift and slide between praise and blame, without ever resolving where they finally stand on fundamental issues. The one thing they cannot tolerate is anti-communism, even as they make use of the most telling elements of the anti-communist critique.

IN THIS way Schrecker knowingly alludes, if only in an isolated passage, to the Communist Party's "central commitment to Stalin's Russia" and its "authoritarian structure." Yet she is willing to accept the Party's credentials as "left-wing" and "radical." Has there ever been an American left-wing or radicalism worthy of the name that had a "central commitment" to such a foreign power and was based on such a structure? It was this kind of commitment that caused Charles de Gaulle to describe the French Communist Party as "East," not "left." Is it merely a peccadillo that a so-called left-wing party should be "authoritarian"? Are there no limits to what is acceptable in an American left-wing or radicalism? What is bound to happen to such terms as left-wing and radical—and, in other contexts, to the term socialism—if they are stretched so far that they can be compatible with such a social monstrosity as Stalin's Russia and such a political disease as "authoritarianism"?

The New Left ambivalence is almost perfectly captured in the following:

> The American Communist Party, for all the emotion it once aroused, can now be studied; it is no longer necessary—if it ever was—to condemn or exonerate it. At its peak it was a dynamic and often effective movement for social change, yet it was also—and at the same time—a doctrinaire, secretive, and undemocratic political sect. Its main flaw, of course, was its uncritical relationship with the Soviet Union, a relationship that required its members to conform their political activities to the dictates of Stalin's foreign policy. . . . There were other problems as well. As an ostensibly revolutionary organization, the CP enforced a type of disciplined and conspiratorial behavior that may well have stunted the development of a viable socialist tradition in America. And yet in spite, or perhaps even because, of these serious defects, the Party did make important contributions. It helped build the CIO, and it helped bring the problems of American blacks into the political agenda. The record is mixed. To view it in any other way is to distort the past.

Nothing gives away the peculiarly protective post-New Left attitude toward the Communist movement more than the singular idea that "it is no longer necessary—if it ever was—to condemn or exonerate it." Schrecker is evidently doubtful whether it was necessary "to condemn or exonerate it" even in its heyday, during which it was most subservient to the Soviet Union. What is there about American Communism that exempts it from condemnation or exoneration? If the same benevolence were extended to Schrecker's own subject, the universities during the McCarthyite period, she would be unable to condemn or exonerate anything done during those years. Yet her book is full of both study *and* condemnation. This counsel of selective condemnation is itself a form of tacit exoneration.

One might also imagine that Schrecker had used a mathematical instrument to calibrate the merits and demerits of American Communism. The aim of the entire exercise is to get to the apparently impartial verdict: "The record is mixed." Yet it might at best be considered "mixed" only if the alleged merits and demerits were commensurate. For example: the Party did not merely help to build the CIO. It also helped build itself in the CIO. It split the CIO. It sacrificed its own interests in the CIO as soon as conformity with the "dictates of Stalin's foreign policy" called for a break. But even this misses the main point. It is precisely the "mixture" of a central commitment to Stalin's Russia and an authoritarian structure with activity such as the participation in the CIO that is the source of the deepest culpability: the exploitation of idealism in the betrayal of ideals. The disruption caused by the Communists, when they have to obey their central commitment and structure, is incommensurate with the "help" they give, the main motive for which is to provide themselves with a "mass base." A summing-up that "the record is mixed" is a cop-out. The record of almost all movements, radical or otherwise, is mixed, but not in the same way or in ultimate outcome. A mixture that contains lethal "defects" is not an ordinary mixture.

This easy indulgence toward the Communist "mixture" comes out most revealingly in Schrecker's prescription for studying the Communist movement in America. It is an excellent statement of what has become the party line of the post-New Left historians:

> Though I am no believer in what is usually called "objective" scholarship, I am not sure that the history of the CP is served by judging every action the Party took. In addition, much of the current research seems to be asking the wrong questions. It studies the Party's top leaders instead of middle-

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level cadres and rank and file, and thus does not look at the most interesting aspect of American Communism: why and how it came to dominate the American left during the 1930s and 1940s. To do that we will have to find out what ordinary Communists did on a day-to-day basis. That information may be harder to find than what line the Party leaders took on a specific issue, but it may well provide more insight into the role of the CP in American political life.

This credo comes strangely from one who has vouched for the Communist professors' "objectivity and fairness." Evidently Communists can believe in "objective" scholarship, but she cannot. Strangely, too, she objects to judging "every action the Party took" but wants to study "what ordinary Communists did on a day-to-day basis." Apparently the ordinary Communist's every action is more relevant politically than the Party's every action. This differentiation between the Party and ordinary Communists is another myth. It implies that what ordinary Communists did on a day-to-day basis was largely unrelated to the Party's own actions. The Party here becomes an empty abstraction, divorced from its membership. In fact, the Party was made up of its top leaders, middle-level cadres, and rank and file. To get anything done, the top leaders bore down on the middle-level cadres, and the cadres bore down on the rank and file. The shift in emphasis from the Party to its "ordinary" membership serves a political purpose: it atomizes the Party, thus disguising its essential nature by glossing over its admittedly top-to-bottom "authoritarian structure." As for judging *every* action of this or any other party, no historian can do that; the problem is always to judge the significant and relevant actions.

Why should a study of the middle-level cadres and rank and file be more interesting and provide more insight than a study of the top leaders? There is no reason to separate these ranks in the Party, as if there were two or three separate Parties. That none of these three categories spent every waking moment of their lives doing their Communist duty hardly needs saying. Another of the new historians, whose book Schrecker mentions with the reservation that he does not name names as she does, sagaciously advises students of the Communist movement to pay attention to "who stopped over at one's house after dinner to play cards, listen to a ball game, sit on the porch drinking a beer, discussing the news" and "whom one could depend on to take care of the kids, lend one money, go shopping." No doubt more important activities, such as working the mimeograph machine at a CIO local or distributing the *Daily Worker* at street corners, might be added. They may make a minor contribution to American social history, but they need not be politically significant or relevant to an understanding of American Communism. They cannot tell us for what ultimate ends such activities were engaged in, where the policies came from, why they were turned on and off.

If Schrecker had taken her own words about the "authoritarian structure" of the Communist Party seriously, she could never have asserted that studying the top leadership would be "asking the wrong questions" and studying the middle-level cadre and rank and file the right ones. The real reason for drawing so much attention to the middle-level cadre and the rank and file is to draw attention away from what was most Communist about them. They behaved as Communists precisely in their relationship with the top leadership, which would have been helpless without them, as they would have lost their political bearings without it.

The reductio ad absurdum of the academic inquisitions during the McCarthyite years is best shown by the change that has come over the university that drove out a truly great scholar, the late Moses I. Finley. The same department in the same university now has a tenured professor who regularly contributes to the theoretical organ of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. and specializes in personal vituperation against anyone who does not follow the full Party line.

Schrecker's book will not help those who seek some light on how and why the Communists in the academy in the 1930s and '40s gave way to the New Left movement of the '60s, and the latter to the post-New Left professoriat of the 1980s. The book will make even more of a mystery of this confusing sequence by propagating so much muddle and mythology about the first of these. Whatever wrongs and "shenanigans" were committed against the Communist professors, there is no reason to make them into exemplars of objective scholarship, academic freedom, and civil liberties.

On Little Cat's Feet

The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America by Martin Amis

(Viking, 208 pp., $16.95)

Martin Amis took "the moronic inferno," he tells us, from a passage in Saul Bellow's novel *Humboldt's Gift*. Bellow himself has attributed the phrase to the misanthropic Wyndham Lewis. I don't know what Lewis's original target was for those lovely, rolling vowels; in Bellow, as may be expected, the reference is to the chaos of modern urban life. Amis has particularized *his* appropriation for us in his subtitle—*And Other Visits to America*—and he explains in his introduction that he is especially interested in the "deep and troubled . . . dreamlife" of our great republic.

So much for the ostensible reason for being of this collection of pieces. Unfortunately, in the same few explanatory paragraphs Amis also allows that the unity was imposed after the fact—that is, he realized at some point that he had on hand a number of stray articles in one way or another related to American cultural life. Now, I'm not against miscellanies in principle. Indeed, in this case the title promises a most enlightening sort of excursion—a look at ourselves *sub specie absurditas* (and by the very blade who authored last season's farcical *Money*). But the contents just don't come through.

The Moronic Inferno has as its points of entry and exit a review and a profile of Bellow, which is fitting in view of the fact that Bellow is one of the very few writers we have who has tried to sustain a panoramic, eagle's-eye view of our social landscape. The other 27 items break down pretty evenly between profiles of popular, middlebrow, or over-

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rated American writers (Capote, Roth, Mailer, Vidal, Heller, Vonnegut, Burroughs, Updike, Didion, Theroux, and Talese) and chat-pieces on various prominent—and obvious—extrusions from the collective national psyche (von Bülow, De Palma, Presley, Reagan, Falwell, Steinem, Spielberg, and Hefner). In addition, there are bits of reportage on the Atlanta killings, Palm Beach, the evangelical right, *Vanity Fair*, and, yes, AIDS.

LOOKING AT a culture from without has certain advantages. The observer (most of these pieces were written for the English journal of that name) can command some of the anthropologist's detachment, for one thing. He also has a tonal freedom denied to the native—he can sneer, mock, and condescend to his heart's content. Amis avails himself of all three options, most liberally of the last. Any American who has traveled abroad will recognize the friendly, bemused, confidential manner. And though Amis is clever enough to point his attitudes out even as he indulges them ("Oh God, we think"—he is referring to British critics on American novelists—"here comes another sweating, free-dreaming maniac with another thousand-pager; here comes another Big Mac"), the reader feels upon finishing that he has just passed an evening with somebody's "very nice, you'll like them" intellectual friends from Paris or London.

One of the subtle *dis*advantages of inspecting a culture from without is that it's very difficult for the outsider to tell a fresh insight from a commonplace. Unless, of course, that person is endowed with a decisively singular temperament, in which case every observation is of interest. Amis has not been thus endowed. His sensibility is precisely that of the literate John Doe. He is superficially cultivated—he is up to date—but not insightful; snide, but not dangerous; observant, but only of the cliché. What he notices about American fauna are precisely the things that our own journalists and supplement hacks long ago converted into received opinion. Palm Springs is a spiritual wasteland; Gore Vidal is a vain patrician pretender; Philip Roth is only concerned with Philip Roth. Ask me another! This stuff may be new to the readers of the *Observer*, but attentive culture-browsers will zip through it and go right back to *Vanity Fair* without so much as a transitional bump.

Amis's account of his visit with Truman Capote is a fair representation of his approach to the American literary celebrity. He begins with a genteel-sounding but slyly derogatory staging gambit:

> It was, I hope and trust, a radically below-par Truman Capote who received me at his U.N. Plaza apartment on an equatorial New York afternoon.
>
> "Truman's sort of sick," said the lady from Random House who answered the door.
>
> "Oh dear. Would you rather I . . . ?"

That "hope and trust" is completely disingenuous, for starters. The interview took place four months before Capote died. Anyone with an ear for gossip—Amis certainly can't pretend he doesn't have one—knew that the old fellow was dancing cheek to cheek with the reaper. "Oh dear," on the other hand, is so mincing that it passes through the far side of the spectrum to become outright sadism. (Not that its object was famous for controlling *his* more hostile impulses . . . .)

In any event, Amis gains entry. Capote consents to talk from under the covers, and the profile proceeds. We find out in the best New Journalism style about the contents of Capote's bedside table. Meds, mags, and books: *Vogue*, *Interview*, and Tynan's *Show People* . . . . We get a report on T.C.'s visits to the jakes, his sundry nose-blowings. And then a slice or two of verité conversation: "No, I'm just . . . exhausted. . . . Did four *hours* of TV interviews about the new book. . . . No, you know, I uh never drank that much! I mean . . . ." Two pages in and I'm plucking distractedly at my earlobes.

But let's press on. We next get three paragraphs recounting Capote's literary career: early success, famous pretty-boy dust-jacket photo. Two on *In Cold Blood* and its reception. A quick zigzag through pill and drink addictions, the spat with Vidal. A few more quotations (" 'I don't *have* a love life any more,' says a stoical Capote"). Finis. Time now for a personal moment. Amis asks Truman to sign a book. Truman thinks Amis's name is Tony. *Tony?* How awkward! But these are two old pros and they recover the situation. When Amis reaches the street and fires up a cigarette, he reads the inscription:

> *for Martin*
> *I tried!*
> *and you were so patient*
> *Truman Capote*
> *198*

"That '198,' " writes Amis, "wasn't his apartment number: it was a shot at the date. I walked on, hoping that little Truman would get well soon." Like hell you did, Tony.

My own hope, after my disappointment with the literary pieces, was that the rest of the collection might somehow make up the deficit. No such luck. Elvis, I learned, ended his days as an incontinent baby in diapers. Claus von Bülow is a shallow and avaricious—but not *stupid*, for God's sake—con. Hugh Hefner is, it seems, a vapid sybarite. Brian De Palma, about whom I knew nothing at all, turns out to be the very creature I would have imagined: a monomaniacal stringer-together of inchoate and violent imagery. Why he might be this kind of person is never questioned, nor is any understanding proffered about what the success of his spurting

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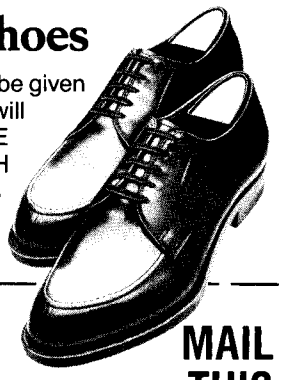

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fantasies might say about the "deep and troubled . . . dreamlife" that so haunts Amis.

The two essays that rise above readable bitchiness are positioned shrewdly at the end of the book. "Double Jeopardy: Making Sense of AIDS," while it delivers nothing new on a topic that shifts its contours daily, is a sane and remarkably empathic piece of reportage, combining information with sensitive ethical deliberation. Again, though, I have to lament an opportunity missed. Had this book been conceived as a real exploration of our moronic inferno, Amis might have gone on to pursue some of the more suggestive implications of his subject. He has a positive genius for brushing against what really matters—

> . . . one cannot avoid the conclusion that AIDS unites certain human themes—homosexuality, sexual disease, and death—about which society actively resists enlightenment. . . . We don't want to understand them. We would rather fear them . . .

—and then letting it go.

Saul Bellow is the one writer who escapes being spanieled at heels by the rebarbative Amis. This is because Bellow has done from within what Amis aspires to do from without. He has burrowed down past the obvious contradictions of the culture; he has reached that place where images and longings move like a miasma over the rock-scape of material conditions. And in "Saul Bellow in Chicago," it is the American who shows us how to think about America. A handful of quotations are enough to remind us what a book like Amis's could be. "For the first time in history," says Bellow, "the human species as a whole has gone into politics. . . . What is going on will not let us alone. Neither the facts nor the deformations." And: "You can say this for Chicago—there's no hypocrisy problem here. Everyone's *proud* of being a bastard." Maybe it's sensibility, maybe it's just that he's had seven decades to get the picture straight in his mind. Whatever the reason, Bellow's acerbic seriousness carries the day. Beside him, our young British friend looks like what Bellow in another context called "a contrast gainer."

SVEN BIRKERTS

Sven Birkerts teaches expository writing at Harvard. *Auspices*, a collection of his essays on contemporary literature, will be published this year by William Morrow.

BEFORE THE DELUGE

Journal of My Life
by Jacques-Louis Ménétra
translated by Arthur Goldhammer

(Columbia University Press, 368 pp., $30)

Does Jacques-Louis Ménétra, a glazier by trade and an autobiographer by secret avocation, give us fact or fiction? It hardly matters. Whether he swaggers, invents, or distorts in self-praise, he is still telling us his truth. And this truth tells us a lot about his dreams and private myths, and still more perhaps about the dreams and myths of his social class in the second half of the 18th century. The manuscript of this remarkable and at times entertaining journal was discovered in the Bibliothèque historique of the city of Paris. It was published in 1982, with notes and a lengthy commentary by Daniel Roche, a specialist in 18th-century popular French culture, and now appears in English with a briskly paced and thought-provoking foreword by Robert Darnton.

Who is Ménétra? Son of a master glazier, he typically follows in his father's trade. But before settling down as an independent artisan in Paris, he starts out as an apprentice journeyman (*compagnon*) on a seven-year *tour de France*, which acquaints him with the network of his professional brotherhood in Orleans, the Anjou, Brittany, the Bordeaux region, Montpellier, Provence, Burgundy, and even Geneva. This roving life of male bonding brings him into contact with the world of taverns, shopkeepers, hospitable widows, and thieves. Still, Ménétra is essentially a child of Paris; his evocations of the growing capital during his years of childhood pranks, bachelor adventures, and married citizen's daily contact with social realities (he lived to witness the Revolution) rival in interest the better known works of Sébastien Mercier and Restif de la Bretonne.

There is a side to this Life that is self-consciously picaresque and farcical. Encounters at inns, the experience of carrying to the next town a woman who has just given birth alongside a country road, witnessing an earthquake, wounding a man in a duel and having to go into hiding, capsizing in a boat, falling into a well when the rope snaps, being kidnapped by thieves, sleeping in the bush and being covered with vermin—these are some of the episodes that describe the risks of travel or adventure. A theater lover (especially of the slapstick variety), probably a reader or hearer of picaresque adventure stories, Ménétra indulges in farcical situations. He still seems to laugh as he remembers the enormous buttocks of the couple aroused from their sleep by an earthquake, or sundry Boccaccio-like sex partner substitutions in bed, or the spectacle of the bitch in heat followed by a pack of dogs that smash all of his father's glass panes. True, false, or exaggerated, what counts here is the rebellious vitality that already characterizes the boyish games (many of them played out by the sandy banks of the Seine, right in the heart of Paris). Many of them ended in physical punishment, but that did not dampen the spirit. Ménétra and his boyhood friends relish brawls, a taste that was to survive into the years of apprenticeship and even into adulthood. Quarrels were often settled with fists, kicks, and sticks.

Violence, it would seem, was a daily reality in what we like to think of as the height of the age of reason. Rape or sexual coercion was not an uncommon pastime. Ménétra seems not at all embarrassed to tell how he and a friend, during an excursion in the forest of Vincennes, came upon a copulating pair, how the interrupted young man began to abuse them, how they threatened him with the sword they snatched from him, took turns on the body of the young woman, and then mockingly thanked her for her cooperation. And some of the violence described is less "playful." Ménétra mentions public executions and the spectacle of men broken on the wheel. He depicts the effects of death by poisoning and by strangulation. He takes a macabre pleasure in telling how Monsieur Henri Samson, the famous executioner, invited him to a secret execution—a kind of private hanging party preceded by jokes and six bottles of wine. And, of course, he literally saw heads roll, some of them his friends', during the days of the Terror.

Ménétra's physical zest and his powers

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of observation account in part for the vivacity of his story. Largely, however, this vivacity is a matter of style. The unsophisticated glazier-autobiographer seems somehow to be aware of a literary tradition (he even prefaces his text with an amusing though clumsy dedicatory poem addressed to his own mind: "*A mon esprit*"); but he is determined throughout to maintain an oral quality by systematically avoiding any punctuation. It is doubtful that this unorthodox pseudo-orality corresponds, as Daniel Roche suggests, to an ideologically libertarian refusal to submit to the dominant culture of his day. But it does confer a sense of immanence on the events narrated. Colloquial terms, popular expressions, ellipses that invite the reader to fill the gaps, stylistic quirks, the staccato of an essentially paratactic narration—all these features give the reader the impression of hearing, not of reading. Hence much of the charm of this text.

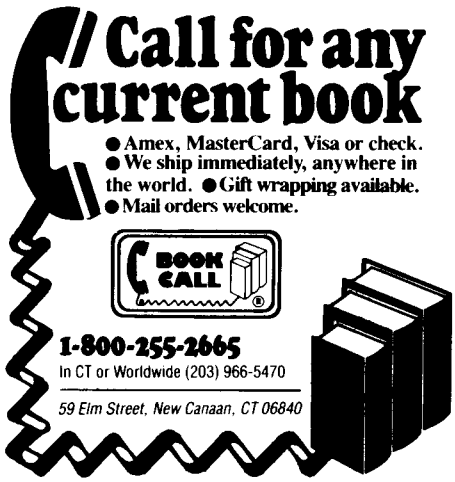
It also follows that the meaning is not always transparent. The translation, which reads well enough and often appears clearer than the original, does not help in this respect. Less colorful than the French, less idiosyncratic, with many ambiguities willfully eliminated, it is also studded with inaccuracies that can only be attributed to lack of familiarity with French colloquialisms. Some of the renderings are amusing; others are downright out of touch with what Ménétra is saying. Thus "I don't want to be pestered again" becomes: "Just don't box my ears a second time"; *arme blanche*, or sword, becomes "white arms"; "ravishingly sweet" is transformed into "ripe for ravishing"; "bitten in the calf of the leg" is rendered as "beaten to a pulp"; "I cuckolded her . . . husband" appears as "I struck a blow at her . . . husband"; and "strengthening the king on his throne" is translated as "confining the king to his throne"—which is about the opposite of what Ménétra is saying.

MÉNÉTRA'S vitality can become tiresome, especially when this street-level Casanova endlessly enumerates his sexual conquests. The clichés about hunting "game," making cuckolds (especially of bosses), fulfilled women, affairs with mothers and their daughters, provide a merciless catalog. The real interest, and the real problems, lie elsewhere. To begin with, what is this autobiographical urge in an *homme du peuple*? What is it that impels this artisan to scribble his memoirs? It certainly is not a quest to reach the inner self, an exercise in introspection. Nor is it an exploration of the various facets of a personality. The self, in fact, does not seem at all important. Could it be, then, that this idiosyncratically written autobiography is the more or less conscious manifestation of a counterculture, that it corresponds to a latent need to challenge the assumptions of a dominant ideology? That would seem to be Roche's hypothesis.

The puzzle is further compounded by our uncomfortable awareness of a cultural and psychological distance: we simply do not laugh at the same things. The problem of laughter is indeed at the heart of this text. Ménétra prides himself on being a master mischief-maker. He loves to play tricks, often cruel ones, on the gullible—and then to laugh himself sick. Much as there is a touch of the universal about slapstick and the belly laugh, something eludes us here. In his foreword Darnton rightly speaks of a cultural gap between our ancestors and ourselves, though he perhaps puts it a little too strongly when he refers to Ménétra's world as almost "inaccessible" and to his text, which reads like "Rousseau turned upside down," as "irreducibly strange."

OF COURSE Rousseau, himself the son of an artisan, readily comes to mind. Ménétra claims to have been befriended by him. He evokes him in his robe and fur cap, on walks examining trees, at the Café de la Régence playing checkers, and is alternately impressed and amused by his preference for the world of the humble (he witnesses Rousseau's refusal of an elegant dinner invitation) and his egalitarian convictions. But again, Restif de la Bretonne and Sébastien Mercier also come to mind, especially in their role as observers of the social realities of Paris.

It is as a social document that Ménétra's autobiography is most rewarding. Some of the information is miscellaneous, but it is fascinating precisely because of that. We learn about the disrepute of soldiers and the contempt for women who live with them, the irritation with people entitled to carry a sword (Ménétra himself achieves this status when he becomes a firefighter), bizarre and superstitious remedies and police regulations (a drowned or drowning person had to be left in the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"THE REAL PROGRAM of the anti-Reagan posse, which some liberals have been so incautious as to avow, is to undo Reagan's foreign policy. If congressional Democrats want a Sovietized Central America, and fifty million refugees in the Southwest, let them say so—or realize that others will say it for them. If, on the world stage, they want a reprise of the Ford-Carter interregnum, when Iran, Indochina, and the Portuguese empire went down the tubes, they can have it—along with the responsibility."

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water until the inspector arrived), attitudes toward venereal disease, games of *paume* and *battoir* (early versions of tennis) for which noblemen recruited vigorous young tradesmen, "short arm" inspections by madams in bordellos, the practice (on Sundays and holidays!) of bringing bouquets of flowers to the prostitutes if one was their lover.

Specific details about Ménétra's professional life are particularly useful to the social historian. The text tells us a great deal about the guilds' festive rituals, ceremonial traditions, and honor codes, the spirit of the fraternity of *compagnons*; the job offers communicated from town to town on the *tour de France* (there seems to have been a manpower shortage in the provinces); and the daily work conditions of glaziers, who did not belong to the most honored guild but still stood quite above the common people.

The autobiography also casts light on family relationships. Jacques-Louis Ménétra followed in his father's footsteps, as did his own son, who also was trained as a glazier. But it would be wrong to assume that such continuity insured stability and harmony. Relations between father and son were turbulent, acrimonious, often violent. The father, a widower when Ménétra was an infant, was given to drink, and the son often had to be protected against the father's brutality. It must be said in favor of Ménétra (if we can trust his account) that he was forgiving and even solicitous of his father, who became a pathetic figure in old age—half blind and mistreated by his daughter. Still, it is revealing that the horrendous death of Damiens, who was quartered for having wounded the king (regicide was viewed as a form of parricide, as a direct affront to God), should be evoked on the same page on which Ménétra tells how on a given occasion of paternal violence he was obliged to draw his knife.

THREE apparently unrelated themes are interlocked: theatricality, anticlericalism, the ambiguities of revolution. This native Parisian considers his city delightful largely because it provides a continual spectacle: cabarets, puppet shows, street theaters, fireworks, public executions. It is not by coincidence that Ménétra mentions in the same sentence a famous harlequin of the Italian theater, the executioner officiating on the Place de Grève, and the archbishop of Paris—and implies, moreover, that all three share the same mistress. Carlin the actor, Samson the executioner, and Christophe de Beaumont the archbishop are referred to as the "three leading Harlequins of France"—with only the difference that the last does his acting at Notre Dame.

The subversive nature of an irreverent passage such as this is confirmed by repeated and outspoken expressions of anti-clericalism. Spicy anecdotes serve to point out how some priests use confession to seduce women. Ménétra likes to generalize: all priests are hypocritical and feed on the people's credulity and fanaticism. He makes fun of relics, denounces the priests' avarice, is shocked by the sale of indulgences. Occasionally he gets involved in a conversation-debate with a priest, but inevitably concludes that he is a better Christian than those who moralize. The dislike of priests has, of course, a deeper significance. Ménétra essentially believes that all mysteries are lies and all sacraments inventions, that the Eucharist is a farce. With bitterness he derides the "holiness of the Roman religion."

This is not to say that Ménétra is devoid of religion. He believes in a Supreme Being, he prays to Providence, he gives thanks to the Eternal. But his God is supremely tolerant. Or rather, intolerance is what he most abhors in the institution of religion. In this respect, some of the most interesting and surprising pages of this Life deal with the persecution of Jews. During his days as a journeyman in Provence, he visited the ghettos (*juiveries*) to flirt with Jewish girls and "play tricks" on the Jews. One day he and his friends even stole two chickens from a Jew walking in the fields without

MIRANDA IN RENO

In a silent room surrounded by sand I sleep.
Sometimes the phantoms of the dead
on the far shore wrestle for hours
with the great questions he and I—
and everyone we had ever forgotten—
abandoned when we fell out of love,
when the long nights appropriated us.

Or maybe they aren't phantoms.
It's winter on that island, the frozen
snow is bricked high for miles,
like a seawall to discourage visitors:
in spring it will thaw, the beach will flood,
and the actors masquerading as ghosts will drown.

To marry means to halve one's rights & double one's duty.
Or as a friend observed at his ex-wife's wedding:
divorces open out, marriages close in.
Really both are imaginary lines over which
two briefly parallel lines intersect,
creating a rectangle—a cell.
Everyone I know is drowning trying to escape some island.

Other times, the dead on their milky shore
rock in unison in marble chairs
and agree that the great questions
were so many distractions they erected
like a long white wall to keep themselves
from falling too deeply in love.

Last night in the dry stillness I dreamt
of that island again: the snow fell fast
and under the ice the drowned men recited
their lines, scripted subtly by my former husband.
It's true, you see, they aren't phantoms.
But who can say how I came to this desert,
all my lights burning at noon, and the phone—
off the hook for days—ringing again.

NICHOLAS CHRISTOPHER

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his compulsory yellow hat. When the Jew denounced them, it was he who was punished for not obeying the prescription. The incident was an eye-opener. From that day Ménétra is no longer interested in playing tricks on the "poor Jews." He is appalled by the arbitrary laws that make the Jews victims of fanaticism and superstition, that expose them brutally to exhortations by monks, that force them to hide indoors and in alleyways on the days of the processions. Ménétra goes so far as to speak of the venerability of the Jews, stating that they are more than brothers and equals in the eyes of the Eternal; they are "our fathers."

Ménétra's anti-clerical views and praise of tolerance cast light on his ambivalent attitude toward the Revolution. He was doubtless a sansculotte and a patriot. And he probably militated in various revolutionary sections. But the Terror was another matter, and his indignation probably accounts in part for the confused and at times almost incoherent nature of the pages covering the revolutionary years. He was active, enlisted in the National Guard, became a member and even chairman of various committees; and he witnessed directly some of the major events: the storming of the Tuileries, the fall of Robespierre, the march against the Convention in 1795 when Bonaparte was put in charge of its defense and Ménétra came under the fire of Verdier's artillery. The tone and atmosphere of these days of turmoil, with their assemblies, committees, speeches, votes, acclamations, and absurdities, are evoked with mixed feelings. For these were also days of vindictiveness and denunciations. Ménétra vituperates against the "cannibals" and "man-eaters" who imposed a reign of fear; he recalls the days when food was scarce, paper money was devalued, and the worst instincts came to the fore. The overall assessment is rather negative. What was supposed to bring happiness to the French people turned into a collective calamity. Ménétra's narrative, which stops with the end of the Directoire, welcomes the return to happier times.

Ménétra is hardly a political thinker, and he is certainly not a prophet. But in his fidelity to his own tastes and impulses, in his mixture of lightheartedness and decency, in his combination of full-blooded sensibility and resilient toughness, this observer of a social world soon to be transformed by the Industrial Revolution helps us understand a little better what history books do not or cannot tell us.

VICTOR BROMBERT

Victor Brombert is professor of comparative literature and director of the Gauss Seminars in Criticism at Princeton University. His book *Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel* has just been brought out in paperback by Harvard University Press.

CORRESPONDENCE, *from page 6*

Many U.S. foreign policy decisions all too frequently appear to those foreign countries as being the very opposite of democracy. It is a shame that Iranamok has not made us reflect on our historical relationships with the Pahlavis and Somozas respectfully. It is almost a crime to say that selling weapons to another country is promoting democracy.

BROOKE ALISON BYERS
New York, New York

To the editors:

The Reagan administration has been "trampling on" democracy. It "has shown its dark side" and displayed "shocking ... moral shallowness. The Reagan Magic has come undone. The country should never fall under the spell again." Come now. Such rhetoric would not be overwrought if applied to Juan Perón or Benito Mussolini. But Ronald Reagan? Colonel North is legitimately suspected of illegality and stupidity, while Reagan deserves rebuke for running an inexcusably loose White House. But you guys are making this sound like a rerun of *Seven Days in May*. The *contra* scandal was born of a desperate desire to pursue democracy abroad so as to better *protect* it at home. We must not forget this even as we level our criticism.

JACK NOBLE
Los Angeles, California

LESSONS OF ETHIOPIA

To the editors:

The editorial on Ethiopia "The Famine Next Time" (December 15) bore its message as would a first-grade primer: "See the bad Marxists!" If the intent is to prove somehow that Marxists are inherently morally inferior to non-Marxists, then it only makes sense to cite Cambodia and the Ukraine, man-made tragedies of the worst kind. There is also little purpose in mentioning the forced relocation of Aleuts and Japanese-Americans during World War II, the Trail of Tears, or the Southern plantations if the illusion of our nobleness is to remain intact.

We may then come to the article's conclusion that the present Ethiopian government, under Mengistu Haile Mariam, is not moral enough to receive our humanitarian aid, in which case we abet his efforts to starve even more of his non-Amharic population. This position would be well in keeping with past American policy toward that country.

I would beg to remind TNR of American support, in 1952, of then-Emperor Haile Selassie's efforts to annex forcibly the former Italian colony of Eritrea. As anyone remotely familiar with the emperor's methods can attest, Selassie was no stranger to the benefits of using the food supply to control his subjects. The United States was itself a staunch ally of the autocrat. Having received (among other things) the use of a military communications facility in the Eritrean capital of Asmara, it repaid the favor by sending arms and advisers, teaching the Ethiopian army how to deal with enemies of the emperor in a more modern fashion. Whatever else may be said, Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu learned his lessons well.

THOMAS TOSH
Marietta, Georgia

AGING EXPECTATIONS

To the editors:

Robert Bazell's article on aging ("The Infancy of Aging," December 22) was most informative. However, he made an error in using the term "life span" where he should have used the term "life expectancy."

Most scientists agree that the life span in humans is fixed. The maximum life span is about 120 years (achieved by Mr. Izumi of Japan), whereas the mean life span is about 100 years. It is the life expectancy that has been increasing as nutrition, health care, and other environmental factors have improved. Consequently, the mean life expectancy in developed countries is approaching the mean life span.

LILI PASTERNAK
Instructor, University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Living in a Metaphor

CONGRESS WILL BE massacred next month, and the Capitol burned. "Amerika," the controversial ABC miniseries, will see the nation enslaved by the Soviets while Washington once again assumes its traditional pose as an unpeopled postcard symbol. It's not fair. Washington has, after all, been one of the country's bigger urban agglomerations for decades, and when it comes to paranoid movie fantasies, Washingtonians deserve some parity. The way things stand now—and they've stood this way for years—attacks on Washington, whether by giant atomic insects (*The Deadly Mantis*), invaders from outer space (*Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*), or more earthly enemies, are all concentrated on the Mall and the city's monumental core. The actual city of Washington, where all the people live, remains not Ground Zero, but in cinematic terms the safest place in the country, the Purloined Letter of cities. Washingtonians, who rarely go to the Mall, wouldn't even know it had been attacked until they read about it in the next day's *Post*. Targeting only the monuments means that it's always the tourists who get it in the neck. There's some satisfaction in that.

WASHINGTON HAS NEVER been allowed to emerge from behind its prominent architecture as a place with a perceived character of its own. London, Rome, Paris, even Moscow are capitals that contain symbolic places, but they are also cities with perceived characters and daily rhythms special to them. Washington remains, in its urban entirety, a symbol. The most important reason for this is that while most other major capitals have become the centers of their national cultures, Washington has actually been elbowed out of American culture. The city is covered by the media as if it were a foreign place, sometimes intentionally. It could not vote for president until 1964, regained local government only in 1974, and still has no voting representation on the Hill. The city's mayor, newly reinaugurated, has called on Washingtonians to jettison what he calls their "colonial mentality." Fine. But the door into mainstream U.S. culture needs to be opened from both sides. U.S. consciousness expresses itself best at the pop level, so maybe the mayor should also have called for Washingtonians to join Tokyo in fleeing Godzilla, Rome in escaping Venusian Ymirs, London in avoiding Gorgo, New York in sidestepping King Kong, and Congress in dealing with the invading Soviets.

SPEAKING OF Soviet Washington, one of the lesser aspects of the freeing of Andrei Sakharov from internal exile is the undoing of a piece of local agitprop that was rather clumsy to begin with. For many years Soviet diplomats have worked out of the old Pullman Mansion on 16th Street, near the White House. Not long ago, that block of 16th was officially renamed "Andrei Sakharov Plaza." Overnight, this politicized nomenclature has been transformed from a reminder of Soviet repression to a testimonial to Gorbachevian *glasnost*.

CONGRESS, AND THE local city fathers too, might take a lesson from this, because Washington's city map is threatening to become a reflection of the evening news. When other countries targeted the U.S. this way—as when the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi ended up with a Ho Chi Minh address—it seemed cheap. But now, along with Sakharov's plaza, there is a move to rename the stretch of Massachusetts Avenue where South Africa's embassy is located for Nelson Mandela; a stretch of 15th Street adjacent to the planned Holocaust Memorial has already been renamed for Raoul Wallenberg; and even Walter Fauntroy, the city's non-voting congressional delegate, has some public real estate named for him. This is a real sea change for Washington, which has been relatively loath to alter its place names for anything or anybody, much less to make a political or propaganda point. It took decades for the city to change B Street to Constitution Avenue, for example, or to name Lafayette Park (which previously had no name). By far the greatest number of U.S. military heroes honored by place names are Civil War figures; only MacArthur, among 20th-century generals, has a significant street named for him. This is a healthy state of affairs, While other capitals are filled with reminders of this or that glorious hero or magnificent victory, etc., Washington has more or less kept its head. It would mark an unfortunate change if one had to start discarding the city map along with yesterday's papers.

ONE OF THE least known exigencies in this city of crises is the current memorial squeeze: "significant" available sites are dwindling, and there is a crush by various interests to occupy them. Korean vets want one, the Navy wants one, newsmen want one to honor those who fell covering combat, women vets want one, even admirers of Kahlil Gibran want one, and they're all apparently going to get what they want. Few of Washington's artificial monuments mean anything to anybody; their designs are often disappointments to those who sought their designation, and they are rarely visited. The Vietnam memorial is the first such effort in a half century that is a success by any measure.

THE FACT IS that the city's best-known recent structures are not bombastic monuments at all. They are such purely local places as the Watergate and the Beltway, long since transformed from an expensive office building and a commuter highway into a pair of national metaphors. One has become shorthand for scandal, the other for the capital's presumed self-absorption. This insistence on transforming the whole city into a national metaphor extends to its restaurants, its theaters, even its neighborhoods, whether wealthy or poor. Georgetown is the glitzy example (it is, in the national mind, less a place to hear a band than it is general HQ of the Eastern Liberal Establishment), but the city's once-notorious Southwest slums are another. This old waterfront area once featured a lot of substandard housing, with outdoor pumps and outhouses. Because it lay at the foot of the Capitol, the contrast of mean poverty with the famous dome was an essay in a viewfinder, and many photographers snapped it. Although the old slums have been cleared away for decades, the photos still turn up on book jackets. The best the real Washington can be, it seems, is a kind of anti-monument, stuck forever inside a prism of metaphors that obscure it. Godzilla, where are you?

C. P. F.

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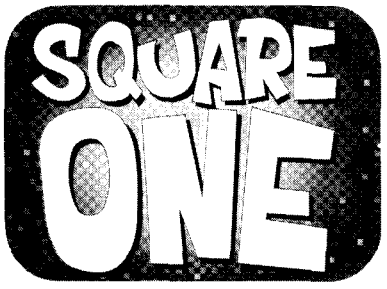

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It's easy to see why. "Square One TV" is produced by Children's Television Workshop, the creators of "Sesame Street." And it makes novel use of entertainment forms kids enjoy. Such as TV game shows, music videos, animation and magic.

IBM is proud to help support "Square One TV." It's another example of our commitment to education.

The program premieres January 26 and will run every day after school. For the exact time, check your local PBS listing.

"Square One TV." It's a math series that gets high marks for entertainment.

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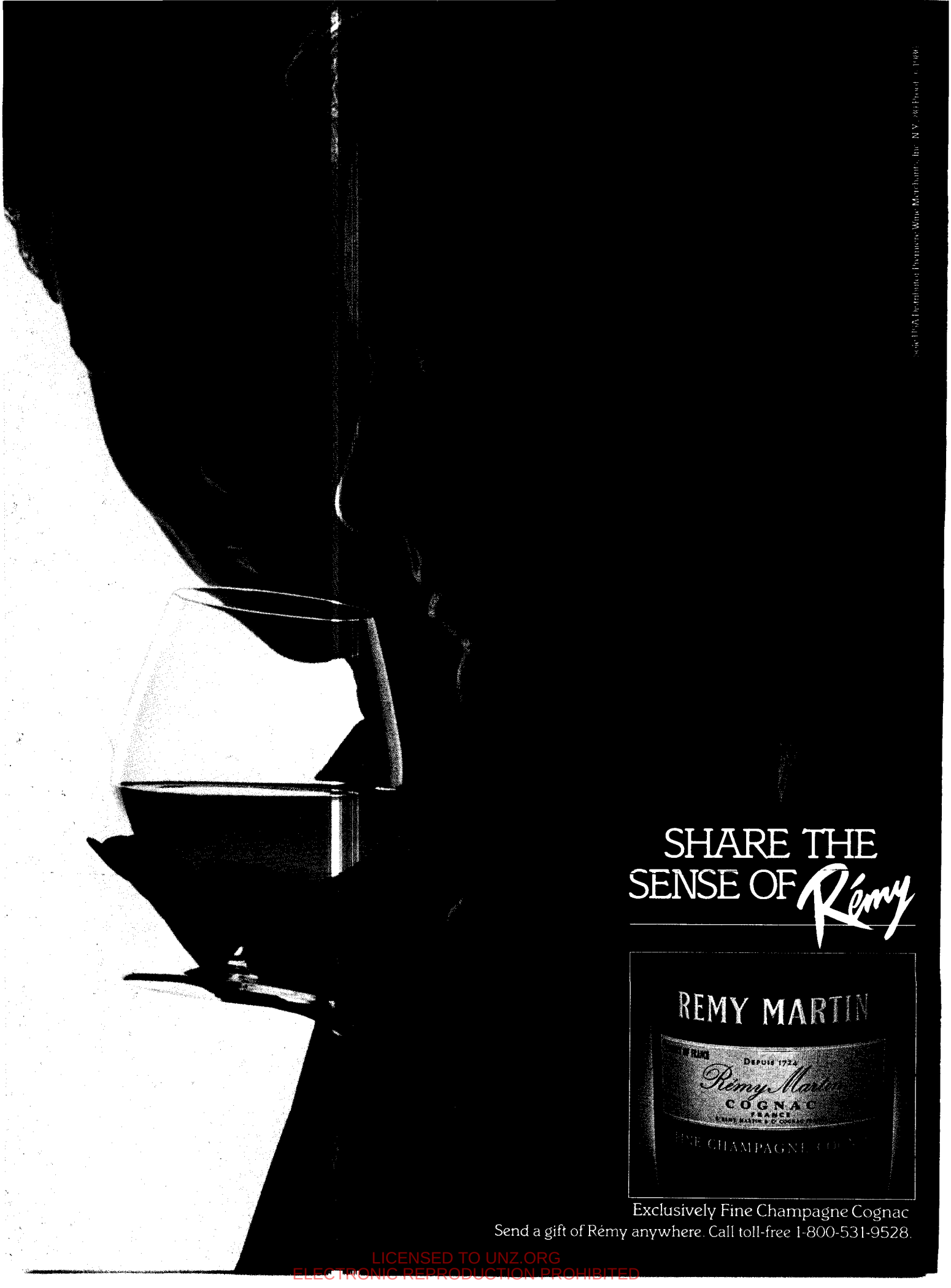

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